

In 1998, I was invited by a team of guys going to India to join that team. Now I was ecstatic about the opportunity. I'm a military brat, so I have traveled all over the U.S. just by courtesy of the U.S. government and your hard earned cash. So thank you for that. I kind of got a bead on American culture, whether that's West Coast, Northwest or the Bible Belt. I just got to live in different places and absorb different things about the country we live in, but I hadn't really been overseas outside of the northern part of Mexico. So I was really excited about going. About three weeks before our trip was scheduled, some violence broke out around some places we were going to be, so they called and said, "If you don't want to go, that's fine. If you want to bring a friend, that's fine." So I thought to myself, "Who could make getting killed fun?" And I answered that question, "Blake Chilton," who is actually our youth minister here at Flower Mound. So in 1998, Blake Chilton and I flew to India. We landed in New Delhi on the night of Diwali, which is the Hindu celebration of Krishna's victory over the lord of darkness. We do not party like that country. That thing was epic. I don't even know how to explain. There are fireworks everywhere, which is not fun when you're flying into a new city. There are candles everywhere. Everybody is handing out candy that is nasty. There are little gods everywhere like Ganesha or Shiva, and they're celebrating these gods. So as we get to the YMCA where we were staying, even in the YMCA there are these idols and candles. I'm just walking around going, "Lord, don't let any demon get one me. I'm here doing Your work. Don't let anything attach on me. Just get me to my room." So we get to the room, we pray and have great couple of days in New Delhi.

Then we took a train ride to Jaipur. A train ride in India is a once in a lifetime thing, because that's the only time you're going to want to do it. At least that was my experience. So we took the train down to Jaipur. We did some work in Jaipur, and our guide there asked our team, "Do you guys want to see the monkey temple?" "Yes! There's a monkey temple?" So I was like, "Let me put on my hat, get a bullwhip and let's do this." So just a group of us got in these cars, and we drove out an hour and a half outside of Jaipur to this monkey temple. It was straight out of Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom. We walk into this thing, and there are drums playing and there's this golden monkey and a plate of bananas set in front of the monkey. They're singing songs to the monkey. There would be these pronouncements where these prophets would come out and say, "This is what the monkey has said." And then people would ooh and ahh over that and would try to implement the prophetic messages of the monkey priests.

It was all like out of a movie, and I felt two things in my gut: intrigue and great sorrow. For all the pain, for all the suffering and for all the poverty, their hope was in something they made. Their hope was put in the monkey god. And I can understand the worship of certain animals. Like lions, tigers and the liger, those things are massive, scary and powerful, and I get how, in tribal areas, you could look at something like a lion and go, "That is to be worshiped and feared." I have a harder time with the monkey or the cow. Even the people of Israel get to the other side of the Red Sea and make a golden calf. There's nothing frightening about a baby cow. There is nothing awe-inspiring about a baby cow. There is nothing awe-inspiring about something that picks its own tail and plays with it. There is nothing awe-inspiring about those things, but this is what it was. They were worshiping this golden monkey.

What I found occurs in myself and others is, when you travel to other cultures, you have a tendency to romanticize the other culture and feel bad about your own, specifically if you're from the West. So my experience is you'll fly into India and dinner lasts four hours, and nobody's rushing to watch a television show. It's crazy. You eat and you talk. Can you fathom that? How crazy is that? They would cook together, and then everybody would sit down and have conversations.

It wasn't a cheeseburger in a van, watching television in the van. You weren't answering e-mails while you were eating, while your kid is playing his video games. So you can romanticize it and go, "Oh, this is what it should be." And then you look back at your own culture and go, "Stinking Americans. Just opulent and spoiled rotten. You make me sick. I make me sick." And I found that this occurs in people, but here's the reality. All cultures everywhere are filled with sinful human beings, which means, in every culture everywhere, there are good, beautiful, Godbesotted, rhythmic, redeemed things, and there are rebellious, wicked things that the Scriptures command to set straight.

So when I travel to Sudan and teach, I am not trying to make them American, I am not trying to change their culture to be an American culture. They couldn't even breathe that air. It's not even a Third World country. What I'm trying to do is let the Word of God bear weight on their culture so they could see what about their culture needs to be brought into how God designed things to work. So I'll often talk with them about American men and some of the issues I have with American men, namely the fact that most of them are boys who can shave and have not in any way embraced the biblical merits on their lives to grow up, find a wife, master something other than the X-Box and rule and reign like God has designed them to rule and reign. But there, they're still doing this, "Do we divorce our wife if she can't bear us a son?" Well we know the answer to that. No. Why? Because in America we don't do it that way? No, because the Bible says, "This is how marriage works."

So on that trip home, I had a lot in my head of, "Indian culture was so cool in this respect, in this respect and in this respect. And we poor Americans are so spoiled rotten with so much opulence. We wouldn't know a blessing if it bit us." And on the flight home, I landed and found out that Americans have their monkey gods too. As funny as that scene is to us, true to form, completely immersed in your own culture, you can't see the silliness in your own culture. So in the same way they're worshipping a monkey, we've got our own little monkeys, and that's what I want to talk about today.

So let's go to Habakkuk 2, starting in verse 18. In this context, God has pronounced judgment on the Chaldeans and basically says that the people the Chaldeans have conquered are going to rise up against them and overcome them, overthrow them and destroy them. And on this day of woe, they're going to be in trouble for some reasons. Let's look at them. "What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols!" So just like the Indians had created something themselves that they put their trust in, we in our culture are guilty much of the same thing. We will create for ourselves an idol that we make, that we create, that we build, and in that we put our trust. So as your pastor for almost nine years now, let me tell you some of the most popular. Number one by in large is the idol of self. We are uppermost in our affections. Even if you'll think about how you choose a church, most of us choose a church on "what it can do for me." And the reason why so many of you don't belong to a community of faith but rather go to several is because you feel like the church is there to meet your needs, not to be that community of faith that you belong to and give to as well as receive from. So for you, it's about a preacher or a style of music. Let me tell you how that idol works itself out as I have seen here in the D/FW area. In the D/FW area, there are no mountains and there are no oceans. So what we have done, since there's not a lot of outdoor culture here, is we have taken physical beauty and we've made it a sport. We have taken physical beauty and have said, "We're going to be attractive." So Dallas is a very, very pretty place. We are all about external beauty. "I'm going to make myself look lovely. Because if I am better looking than you, if I am stronger than you, if I am more chiseled than you, then I validate myself above and beyond you." Now idolatry is a funny animal because it rarely dwells in morally dark things. It almost always dwells in positive things that are made ultimate. So taking care of yourself is a good thing. Eating well is a good thing. The Bible would call both of those things wise. Even the apostle Paul said physical training is of some value. The Bible is going to talk about how we eat, what is smart, how to avoid eating in excess and now not to eat for comfort. The Bible has a lot to say. The problem is those things. The problem is when you take those things, make them ultimate and they become the thing by which you identify yourself. "I am the strong guy. . . I am the in shape girl. . . I am the ____ person." You begin to identify yourself by those things. You see it often and it works itself out a bit

differently in males and females. What I've seen in males is this real desire to look this specific way and to be stronger than others. Now there is a great competition thing that can play into that that can push you into being all that you can be, but it's this, "Just let me look good with my shirt off." It's almost purely physical, and it's a primal, "Let me show that I'm the baddest guy on the planet" kind of thing. And it builds, it consumes and their whole life is built around this external physical beauty. In women, it plays itself out like that also, but what I haven't seen among men as much as I've seen among women is this ferocious comparison that ends up causing a great deal of drama. Like I married a very beautiful woman. I have walked with my wife and seen other women checking out my wife. So part of me goes, "What's wrong with me?" And then part of it, you're getting a glimpse of this dark side of the female soul where they're going, "Do I look like that? Do I need to look like that? Should I look like that?" Or even at times, there's this horrific judgment that occurs where we'll be out and about and see women dressed to the hilt in really tight things, and there's this thing even among godly women where I'm just like, "Hey, it's the Real Housewives of Flo Mo there." I'm just like, "What's happening here? How in the world can you judge soul and character by dress. Even if there is something broken in their soul that has them dressing in such a way that they want external attention, that should grieve your heart. It shouldn't make you angry. It should make you sad that they have not found value in who they are but rather in their ability to catch the eye of the opposite sex and maybe make other women jealous. So you've got this external piece to our idolatry.

And then some of us just don't have that going for us. That's just not a temptation for us because it's just not going to happen. So a lot of us go to the mind. With linear information at our disposal, we just become smart and we pride ourselves on our brilliance. "We don't buy into anything at the surface level. We're going to drill down. We're going to know the truth. We're going to know how things work. We're not just buying anything." And let me say be clear. Please be thinkers, please be seekers and please want to get to the bottom of things. But here is an idolatry to that where you're not going to believe anything that you can't taste, touch or see. So then our mind becomes our idol.

And then you've got this whole third thing that is still about you, but it works itself out in every domain of your life where you want to throw out a certain vibe. So from the car you drive to the clothes you wear to where you live, all of that is carefully thought through and constructed to produce what you want people to see, despite the fact that you don't even like most of those people. So really debt isn't a money issue. It's an image issue. Debt is not about money. It's about image. You spend more than you have to look a part that you want to look because you believe that, by looking that part, you somehow project to the world that you are worth something, that you are viable and that you are legitimate. And that is idolatry. So the primary idol in D/FW is just self.

A secondary idol that I see all over the place is others, primarily two relationships. Relationship one is a significant other. There is this idea built upon the philosophy of Jennifer Aniston movies that there is some mythical one out there who is going to complete you. Like if you just find this one right man, if you just find this one right woman, then all that has plagued you, all that has bothered you, all the loneliness that you have walked in and all the rejection you have experienced will vanish. Just so you know, all the married people make fun of you. Because it's simply not true. Ladies, let's chat. No man will ever be able to do that for you. When you put that expectation on him, it is a smothering, exhausting expectation. He can't do it. It doesn't matter how romantic he is, it doesn't matter how creative he is and it doesn't matter how careful and thoughtful he is, he cannot be that for you. He wasn't meant to be that for you. That hole in your heart, Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, is eternity. Only what is eternal can fill the gap of eternity. Your man, as great as he is, isn't eternal. He can't fill that for you. When you have that expectation, when you place that expectation on him, your man will develop more and more hobbies to get out from under the weight of that expectation, because he can't do it. And guys, that thought of this beautiful, physical being who is going to take care of everyone of your physical and emotional needs and make up for all hugs that daddy didn't give you is going to lead to an unreal amount of conflict in your relationships. Let me just say a couple of things. You need to forgive dad. He did the best he could with where he was, even if he was a schmuck. He did the same that you're doing now if you're a father. And if you're any better than

your old man, that's the grace of God, not your awesomeness. And then you need to learn to love your wife's soul well beyond her body. She's not your donkey. She's not your, "Where's my dinner, woman?" She's not your work horse. So what happens is a man comes into a marriage and says, "My woman is supposed to be all of this," a woman comes into marriage and says, "My man is supposed to be all this," or singles go, "If I could just find this kind of woman/man," and all our hope is wrapped up in these people who are going to fail us and let us down. And then when they let us down, "It's definitely not our fault. Of course it's them. It's not our expectations. It's this." Married people are acutely aware their partner's weakness vs. their own strengths. "She doesn't do this, she doesn't do this and she doesn't do this, but I do this, this, this and this." It's strengths vs. weaknesses. You should always win that. This is what leads to the unraveling of so many different relationships. It's an expectation that's unrealistic. The bar needs to be lowered. You need to find the fullness of life in Jesus Christ and not in a broken human who is going to betray you. It's going to happen.

Now, the other relationship I see this playing out massively, specifically where I live here in Flower Mount, is with our children. I want you to repeat this in your heart after me. "My kid is not going to be a professional athlete." Go ahead and say that to your heart. Talk to yourself. You may be going, "My kid is excellent." But still statistically he is more likely to be struck by lightning while being eaten by a shark than he is to become a pro athlete. So let me set the record straight because I think I get a bad rep. I love sports. I think sports are awesome, as long as they're a game. It's when it's no longer a game but life that you've gone off the deep end. Do you know how I know this? Because my son is playing t-ball. He's five-years-old. And I watch dads yell at their five-year olds, six-year-olds, seven-year-olds in t-ball. "We practiced this! Get your head in the game!" He's five, he just learned not to wet himself. Are you serious? And I know it's you because you don't do that with other games. Like when your boy or girl are with their cousins playing freeze tag, you're not freaking out and screaming at them. They're not playing hide-and-go-seek upstairs with you shouting from downstairs, "Are you serious? Focus!" It's just a game. It doesn't matter. But all of a sudden, now that it's organized, you lose your mind. Can I just lovingly do this knowing that some of you are never going to come back? When you get home today, go pull your yearbook out of the closet or attic, flip to that team photo that you're in or that photo of you catching a touchdown pass, and I want you to hug him, tell him goodbye, shut the yearbook and put it back up. I love how all the wives are clapping right now. I'll give you props. You were legit back in the day, but don't put that on your kids. I know where I'm treading. Your children's extracurricular activities should not govern your home. It is a foolish error for several reasons. One, making kids your god turns them into turds that you then release upon society to have to deal with. So then we've got coworkers and neighbors who are unbelievably obnoxious because of you. And then second, they're going to leave your house. You want them to. I know right now maybe they're five, six, seven-years-old, but there is going to come a day where you love them with all the love you have in your heart right now, but they're going to have to get out of your house. And then do you know what you're left with? Your spouse. So if the focal point of your existence is your children and then they're gone, that puts you in this really weird spot with the spouse who you should have been doing life with this entire time. Biblically a home revolves around a husband and wife under the banner of the gospel of Jesus Christ. What we should be imparting to our children is the wonders and glory of a Creator God who loves them, longs to save them and rescues them from the fallen hurt of this world. And then let's play some ball, let's cheer them on and let's root for them, whether they're excellent or horrible.

My son has a bad case of uncoordinated lankiness right now. I have no idea where he gets that. He stinks, man. And we celebrate that stinkiness. If he wants to go play, we go play. If he just wants to go climb a tree instead, we do that. Because in the end, I just want my son to have fun and play. I don't want him to think that my affection for him is predicated upon his performance in a game. And you can have all the conversations you want with your kid about that's not what's happening, but when you explode at their failures and beam at their successes in this arena, how in the world are they not supposed to buy into that's how they win your affection? "Well I have that conversation with them." If you even think that, I don't think you have kids. Are you telling me your kids can't read your bs? Maybe my kids are just bright, but my kids can just hone in in a second where I'm inconsistent. I can't tell you how often I have to apologize, specifically because Audrey will point it out. And then I have to spank her. It's just this endless cycle. So that's the other place it

plays out, with our kids. Both make crummy, crummy gods. You make a crummy god, a spouse makes a crummy god and your children make crummy gods. They don't work as deity.

And the next line is going to tell us why. "What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols! Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it." Now there comes a time in all of our lives where we will desperately need divine intervention. And if your god is you, your spouse, your children, your health, your wealth or your vibe, you will be godless on a day when you need the divine. So I want to continue to press hard on a couple of things with you so I can stand with a clean conscience before the Lord and for your own joy. Idols are normally built around control and fear. So you have this fear, and you don't want this fear to happen, so you begin to try to control scenarios that you believe will keep your fear from happening. And that's how idols are built. In fact, God will charge Israel with idolatry twice for signing treaties with Egypt and the Assyrians for their protection. They were afraid, so they made this deal with the neighboring country that if they got in trouble, this other army would bail them out, and God goes, "They have become your idol. You're not trusting in Me for deliverance. You're trusting in your own abilities for your deliverance." So what happens on the day of trouble is control is revealed to be what it really is, an illusion. You simply don't control what you think you can control. You don't control your finances like you think you do. You don't control your health like you think you do. Once again, as always, there are things that we can do that are wise and smart but ultimately you can't control. Now we can see even in U.S. history it just takes the bottom to fall out for all of that money you have to become worthless. It just takes an instant. It just takes something that is not related to us, not related to this country. There has been some uprising in the Middle East. How's that gasoline bill going for you? We all work hard at protecting our children, but ultimately you can't protect them from everything. You do what you can, and you have to trust them with God. That's all you got. If you do more than that, I think you'll hard press them and they will rebel. The other place I think you can see this fear/control thing happening in idolatry is with spouses. You just know they're going to betray you, you know they're going to do this thing, and so to keep that from happening, you badger, you pester, you question, you dig and you search where they've been. You see, all of that is fear. So instead you move to control and then unwittingly actually push your spouse away from you, and there's trust, no grace, no intimacy but control. It's an idol, and the Bible says there will come a day when you need the divine. And if you have an idol, it won't be able to speak to you, it won't be able to fix.

Let's keep reading. Verse 20, "But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him." Now if you'll remember the text where we've already been, He keeps saying, "You've made an idol that was speechless.. You created an idol that was speechless. If it says anything, it says lies. You have created an idol that is speechless." And now this last verse says, "God is in His holy temple; let the earth keep silent." He's not saying, "Don't talk to God. Leave God alone. He is in His holy temple, so hush your mouth." But rather He's saying, "Since the Creator God of all things is speaking, let us listen to Him, submit to Him and not walk in conjecture of what God must be like or what He would be like." So you hear people talk like that all the time. "Well I just don't believe God would do that. I just don't believe God works like that." We talked about this a couple of weeks ago, the exclusion of aspects of His character for the buying in of other aspects. "God is love, so He can't have any wrath. . .God is gracious, so He can't hold anybody accountable. . .God is merciful, so surely He won't judge the nations." Now, those are things people say that are in stark opposition to God's revealed character in the Scriptures. So more than anything, this is saying that God is speaking, so maybe we should listen to Him.

Let me read to you Hebrews 1:1-2, and then I want to talk a bit about this, because if you're a bit of an agnostic or an atheist, you're going to have some issues with what I'm about to say. So this is for the good of the saints here who have to answer these kind of questions and then maybe by the Spirit's mercy, for those of you who aren't believers, maybe the Lord will work. Hebrews 1:1-2, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he

created the world." There are two ways to look at the Bible. The most popular being, "This is the road map to life." Have you heard this? In fact, Lauren and I were in Houston on Thursday visiting a family who is down in MD Anderson. Their little girl has cancer, so we were just down to encourage them and love on them a bit. It has not been going well, and we've become soul tied with them and are just heartbroken, so we went down to spend time with them. On the drive back up I-45, there was this sign that said, "Can't find your way? Check My book – God." It's the road map to life. Now in some ways, I want to affirm that view. Because there are things in here that help me understand what I should or should not do at a given crossroads, but it's not a detailed map. If I'm wondering, "Should I marry Lauren Walker?" that's not in here. "Where should I go to college?" This book isn't going to help you. Now I've always joked, there are maps in here, but it's not like, "Here you are. Go left." That's actually Judah and Israel, the divided kingdom. So this is not a road map to life. From Genesis to Revelation, this book is God's self-disclosure of Himself in reconciling all things to Himself in Christ. More simply, this book from Genesis to Revelation is about Jesus. So when we look at David and Goliath, David and Goliath is not some children's story about you overcoming your difficulties. It is a historic moment that is meant to be a shadow of God saving His people in Christ from sin and death. When we look at Noah and his ark, it is a historic moment. It's also a shadow that there would be salvation from the wrath of God. As we watch Moses lead people out of slavery and into the Promised Land, Colossians says it's a shadow of what Jesus would do for us. He would lead us out of slavery and into the Promised land. On and on I could go. So the Bible is not a road map to life, although there are aspects of how we live our lives that are found in the Scriptures. Rather it is a book about God reconciling everything back to Himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

So if you're a bit of a skeptic, then here should be your issue. You should be saying right now, "Matt, you're doing the same thing the monkey prophets did. Because the Bible was written by men, Matt. And since the Bible was written by men, how is it different from the monkey temple guys who came out and said, 'Thus sayeth the monkey'? How is it any different?" It's very different on several fronts. Let me cover some of them. Let me give you what is indisputable when it comes to the Bible, and then we can get into what is disputable. There are 39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament books written in three languages: Hebrew, Greek and a bit of Aramaic. It was written on three continents: Africa, Asia and a bit of Europe. It was written over a time period of over a thousand years. The authors include kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, scholars, etc. Books cover history, sermons, letters, hymns and a love song. There are geographical surveys, architectural specifications, travel diaries, family trees and numerous legal documents. It covers hundreds of controversial subjects with unbelievable unity, from different cultures, across a thousand year period of time, in different languages. It is a spectacular book with one theme, one point and one direction. A couple of other things. It runs contrary to the desires of most men and women. It wants to say, "This is where joy is found," despite the fact that men and women historically, across all cultures have said, "No, I can find joy and life over here." So if you want to build a religion, you usually do that by telling people what they want to hear. So at the monkey temple, it's, "If you give certain offerings to the monkey, then your crops won't fail. If you give certain offerings to the temple, then your pigs won't die." But the Bible is a lot different than that. If you ask cultures, "Men, what do you think about sex," the response is, "Yes please." But the Bible is going to say, "Sex is good, beautiful and God-created, and here are the confines in which you should participate in this gift to you for your greatest joy and God's greatest glory." So God begins to outline how He created things to work, and it runs contrary to our rebellious nature. So He's not trying to win friends and influence people.

The second thing that is unbelievable in the Bible is there are only four guys in Scripture I would let watch my kids: Jesus and the boys in the fiery furnace. Everyone else is questionable. No one else passes the background check. King David would be like, "I can play my harp and put them to sleep." Yeah, but you slept with somebody who was not your wife and then you killed her husband. Moses, "I led millions of people into the Promised Land." And you murdered a guy with your bare hands. I'm sorry, you can't watch Norah. The Bible is filled with shady characters. And this goes back to the point that the book is about the mercy and beauty of God in Christ and not you and me. Because almost all the men

and women in Scripture are these abject failures who God uses mightily. Why? Because the point is Him, not you. So for those of you who like the other end of the spectrum where you loathe yourself, that's just as much idolatry as loving yourself. Both are saying, "I have no need of the cross of Christ." Both are wrong.

So what happens when you get into this dialogue about the Bible is one of two things. People tend to try to paint the Bible as some kind of old-school, fundamental, weak, 1950's, Leave It to Beaver kind of, out of date, Reebok high tops with Op shorts and a fanny pack kind of feel. If you dress like that, let your wife help you. This is what's painted. You're not with the times. Now there are a couple of issues I have with this. So I'm arrogant for saying that I believe the Word of God is the measure of how life should function, but you're not arrogant for believing that your own brain is the standard? And then on top of that, you have to believe that you think this culture at this time is the apex of human existence. Now, let me be straight. My grandparents can embarrass me. Specifically around race and things like that, they just embarrass me. We've had to have some loving confrontations. "Don't talk like that. . . Don't say those words around me." It's a shameful thing that they don't understand is shameful. And if you don't think that same thing on a different subject is going to happen to us thirty years from now, you're a fool. And so this first bit of it being old-school is, "Oh, so I'm trusting in thousands of years of history that have actually yielded some pretty fascinating and phenomenal results. I'm such an idiot."

Now the second thing that happens more often than not is regurgitation. What I mean by that is they will just go, "Well the Bible is just filled with inconsistencies." Every time I hear that, I simply want to go, "Okay, show me." Nine times out of ten, they can't show me. They're just regurgitating. But there are semblances of inconsistencies in the Scriptures that need to be unpacked. So for the guy or girl who would say, "There are inconsistencies, and here is what they are," it usually can be solved by intro level of hermeneutics. Here's what I mean by that. You don't read history and poetry the same way. You read them differently. They are two different genres of literature. You don't read them the same. So what I have found a lot of the time on the inconsistency front is they want to come out of Psalms and talk about the natural order and say, "That's now how the natural order works." I'm like, "It's a poem." Edgar Allen Poe's The Raven is terrifying. I never read it by myself. It scares the weirdness out of me. Rap tap tapping on my chamber door. That just freaks me out. Now, in that poem, what does the raven say? "Nevermore." Now do you think Poe was really trying to convince everybody that an actual raven talked to him? Maybe. He was insane after all. But we don't read poetry like we read history. So you can't go to the Psalms and say, "Look what it says about the sun. Scientifically we know it doesn't work that way. You see? It's inconsistent." No, it's a poem. You read poetry different than you read history, different that you read a genealogy, different than you read architectural specifications. Different genres require different interpretation.

And then here's the other thing that happens. There is a fundamental posture of heart when it comes to the Scriptures that reveals where your heart really is. People either come to the Scriptures with a heart that desires for it to be true or they come to the Scriptures with a heart that doesn't want it to be true. And depending on where your heart is, you'll find all the ammunition you need. I'll give you an example of this from the New Testament. The Pharisees and Scribes loved to question Jesus, He always nailed them and it never led to their repentance. So they get together and go, "How can we trip up Jesus? How can we turn the crowd against Jesus? Let's ask Him about taxes!" And then they come over here and it's like, "Hey, should we pay taxes to Caesar?" And Jesus goes, "Does anybody have a coin? Whose picture is that on the denarius? It's Caesar's. So why don't you give to Caesar that which is Caesar's and give unto God that which is God's." And it's not like they go, "Oh, He's right. He's the Messiah. Praise Your name. We're going to follow You." No, they're like, "Dang it. Okay, gather up. What are we going to get Him with now? How about resurrection!" And then they run back out and go, "Okay, let's say there was this dude and he had a wife. He died, and his brother married his wife. He died and the third brother married his wife. On and on through seven brothers. At the resurrection, whose wife is she?" And Jesus goes, "Man, you don't understand the resurrection. In the new heavens, in the new earth, when all things have been made new, we won't be given in marriage like we are here. Marriage is a shadow of covenant. Covenant will be fulfilled.

Our relationships there will be so vastly superior to our relationships here that marriage won't be an aspect of the new heaven and new earth. I'm not saying you won't know your spouse or you won't have special affections for them. I'm just saying the relationships we have in the new heavens and the new earth, when all things have been renewed no longer require shadows because we'll have the true form. Marriage is a shadow of something, and we'll have the actual true form in the new heaven and new earth." And do they repent? Absolutely not. They immediately go back and just do this over and over again until they figure out they can't get him, so they decide to kill Him. "He has grown too powerful. He keeps duping us. Let's kill Him." And then you get the cross.

So what I have found is that a lot of people approach texts in the Bible like this. "Let me prove it wrong." So they Google "Bible inaccuracies." Here's one from a conversation I had with a young man two weeks ago. Matthew 28:5-7 says, "But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified." Now in John 20:11-12, the exact same story is located. Here's what it says. "But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white." So in the Matthew text, one angel speaks to her, and in the John text, there are two angels. Now if the fundamental posture of your heart is, "I do not want to believe the Bible, and I do not want to submit to the God of the Bible," then this is a problem. If your fundamental posture is, "I love the Lord. The Holy Spirit has awakened me to reality, what do I do with this?" it's a lot more simple. So if I get home here in a little bit, sit down with Lauren and she asks me if I talked to Josh Patterson and I say, "Yeah, I talked to Josh, and here's what we talked about." And then later on, Josh may call me and say, "Hey, did you see my folks at church today." I'll say, "I did. They actually sat where they normally sit." Now Lauren would not yell from the kitchen, "You are a liar!" No, I didn't lie. I just didn't go, "I saw Josh, and do you know who else I saw? I saw this person, this person, this person. . ." I didn't do that. Why? Because that's not what she was asking. So Matthew says an angel spoke to her. John is a furtherance of the narrative. So we know one angel spoke, but there were two angels there now. How do we know that? There is unity in the Scriptures.

So God speaks to us, not like a silent idol. He speaks to us in His Son Jesus. What is He saying? He's saying that you and I are broken from birth. Sin isn't just an external action. It's a state of our heart that leads to those external actions. There are things that are sinful, but you do sinful things because you are sinful yourself. The problem isn't the action. The problem is you. There is nothing you and I can do to fix this issue. God is going to fix it for us. He's going to fix it by sending Jesus, God in the flesh, to live a righteous life under the law, breaking no commands. He will then impute that righteousness to those who believe by faith. And on the cross of Jesus Christ, all the wrath meant for you and me in our rebellion will be absorbed by Christ so that we are, by the power of the Holy Spirit, set free to pursue God regardless of where we currently are. So this is why we constantly come back to this idea of moralistic deism here. So many of you are like, "Let me clean up my life, and then God and I will be cool." I'm here to tell you, you and God will never be cool because of your cleaning. You and God will be cool because of Jesus Christ or you won't be cool. Our hope is steadfastly rooted in Jesus Christ. It's also why you've got nothing to boast in. It's also why there should be no swagger in you. There should be a lowliness, a humility and a gentleness concerning all peoples. Why? Because you were shown mercy and grace. You weren't saved because you were awesome. You weren't saved because you had some things that God needed for His kingdom. You were saved because He's merciful. And that's where we put our hope.

So how do you identify idols? I have ten questions to ask yourself. What consumes most of your thoughts and feelings? What motivates the things that you do? What are you most afraid of? What brings the highest amount of frustration or anger into your life? What is one thing that can change your mood in a second? What would your friends say is your favorite topic of conversation? What are some things that you feel you can't live without? What brings you solace? What do you yearn for? What is one thing that you wish God would do for you? If you begin to answer those questions, you'll be able to find your idols. Because what you think about, what you yearn for, what you talk about, what you want God to do for you, what drives you, what makes you angry, what satisfies you and what brings you comfort is what you worship.

Now you and I, everyone in this room has idols. Nobody is clean. The good news is that God knows and has made provision in Christ. So may we repent and trust in Him for that.

Let's pray. "Jesus, I thank You for today. I thank You for Your Word. I thank You for how it bears weight on us and presses on us. I pray that I have not caused any unnecessary offense. I pray that You might speak to us clearly, that You might continue to draw our hearts up into You and that You might further our confidence in Your mercy and grace towards us. We love You. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."

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