

1. As we continue this morning with our series, "A New Thing", allow me to read the foundational passage of scripture we have been using.
2. Isaiah 43:18-19 "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. 19 See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."
3. Now, last week our title was, "Can I Get a Witness". We dissected Isaiah 43 verses 8-12.
4. Let's review for just a moment what we talked about last week, because we are going to build on it this week.
5. In verse 8 Isaiah says, "lead out those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf".
6. We said that these blind, deaf ones are a reference to idols. These things that had taken the place of most importance away from God.
7. At the time of this writing, it was fairly common for people to have physical idols, or symbols that they worshipped.
8. But Isaiah exposes the fact that these idols are blind and deaf. They have eyes but can't see. They have ears but can't see.
9. Meaning they are worthless, false gods that are incapable of helping us and guiding us and loving us. They are just things.
10. Whereas, God is a living, breathing, working God who sees us and hears us and responds to our cries for help.
11. We said from a practical standpoint it might seem foolish. Who would trust in a god or a thing that couldn't see and couldn't hear, and as a result couldn't help? You would think no one.
12. But the reality is everyone is susceptible to trusting in a god that can't see, or hear, or act on our behalf.
13. There is an element of our sin nature that makes us inclined to do just that.
14. If not kept in check, our sin nature will lead us to trust in things or people that can't satisfy, that don't last, and that can easily be taken.
15. So, God's desire is that we recognize and reject these false gods, and instead turn our love and devotion to Him.
16. However, the world does something different.
17. In verse 9 Isaiah says that "the nations gather together, and the peoples assemble", and their focus is on these former things, these

false gods. And they try and prove that these false gods are real, even though it is as plain as day that they are not, by bringing out false witnesses who try and prove that this way of living is right, and good, and true.

18. But the Lord declares in verse 10 that we as believers have a calling on our lives to be witnesses to the truth. What is the truth?
19. We are invited to know and believe and understand that there is no god like the one true God.
20. That the Lord God is the only savior. That apart from Him, everything else is a worthless, fake, false substitute.
21. So, as we closed last week we identified that what the Lord was doing was he is trying to urge us to forget those former things by stripping away from our lives everything that is false, and as a result leads to death rather than life.
22. So, today I want us to spend some time uncovering what these former things might look like and how they affect our lives.
23. Specifically, we want to identify some things that potentially could be idols in our lives, and how those idols are established or set up.

TITLE: The Old Thing.

INTRO:

1. Let me begin by sharing a series of events that started happening in my life almost 3 months ago.
2. In early November, most of you know I became very sick. Ran a fever for about 12 days in a row. One Sunday we had to cancel service because of our exposure to Covid-19.
3. This sickness came on me suddenly, much like it has for others I have talked to.
4. On a Monday, the second week of November, I ate lunch that day, and felt completely fine. 100% healthy.
5. But by that evening I started feeling not so well, and I realized that something was wrong, when I made myself some dinner. Took a bite of food, and realized I couldn't taste one single thing. Nothing.
6. Then quickly realized I couldn't smell anything either.

7. At noon that day I could taste and smell perfectly fine, and by 5:30 I could taste and smell absolutely nothing.
8. Since then, I have been on this taste and smell journey. Let me cut to the chase by saying, I still am not tasting and smelling at 100%.
9. As of today, I would say I am tasting and smelling only about 50% of what I was before I got sick.
10. And after nearly 3 months of dealing with this. I'm going to confess it has been bothering me.
11. I have just lost the joy of tasting and smelling things. And so, a couple of weeks ago I started praying pretty passionately, asking God to restore my taste and smell.
12. The answer didn't, and hasn't come, so at one point I started questioning God in my prayer time.
13. I believe that God can handle our questions and that it doesn't upset him for us to ask, so I started asking.
14. God. Why would you allow a disease that takes away taste and smell?
15. God. I am 50 years old and I have never heard of any disease that eliminated taste and smell as a symptom. God, why would you allow that?
16. Almost immediately after asking God that question, the words of Philippians 3:19 began to flood my heart and mind.
17. **Philippians 3:18-19** For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.
18. As I read that, the phrase in verse 19 jumped out at me.
19. "Their god is their stomach."
20. Their god is their stomach. I've read that verse dozens of times in my life, but never once stopped to ask God what it meant.
21. But there it was. Staring me in the face. I had asked God why he allowed a disease that takes away taste and smell, and his response is, because there are those in our world who have made their stomach their god.

22. And the Holy spirit said to me, I have allowed a disease that takes away taste and smell because it's pretty hard to feed, or worship the god of the stomach if you can't taste or smell anything.
23. Now, I don't mind telling you. That response from God left me with more questions than answers.
24. And on top of that it messed with my faith. I was troubled by the fact that it is possible to make our stomach our god.
25. I then intensely, over a period of several days began to examine myself and ask God to show me if I was guilty of having this idol in my life. But also, to give me more insight into what this god of the stomach looks like.
26. Several days later the Lord began to open my heart to hear what he had to say. This is what I heard.
27. Before I tell you what I heard, I want to be clear that I am not saying every person has made their stomach their god. But the Lord gave me some very specific wording, and I am going to use that wording in this description of what this god of the stomach is like.
28. God said.
- The average person spends more time thinking about what they will eat next, than they do thinking about their relationship with the Lord.
 - The average person spends more time buying or preparing food than they do serving the Lord in some capacity.
 - The average person spends more money on food, than they do honoring the Lord with their tithe and offering.
 - The average person spends more time talking to unbelievers about food than they do about Jesus.
29. (pause)
30. Basically, the Lord was saying that our stomach can become our god when it receives more attention, time, devotion, and resources than our relationship with the Lord.
31. How many are still with me this morning?
32. And the reality is, it's not just food or our stomach.

33. There are multitudes of things or even people that can become little gods in our lives.
34. Those things or people can dethrone the Lord from the proper place of importance he deserves and demands in our life.
35. And it is entirely possible for any and even all of us to unknowingly have these little lifeless, blind, and deaf gods in our lives.
36. So, in order to give the Holy Spirit something to work with so he can reveal to us where we stand, let's spend the rest of our time talking about the characteristics of idols.

Not necessarily bad.

1. The first thing we need to know about potential idols in our lives is that very rarely is the object of our affection a bad thing. More times than not this thing that becomes the idol is a good thing.
2. In the case of our stomach as our god. Stomachs aren't bad and neither is food. Both of those are very good things. But those good things can still become stumbling blocks in our lives.
3. Allow me to give you another example.
4. Isaiah makes a comment about wood. And how something as simple as wood can become an idol.
5. **Isaiah 44:15** It is used as fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it.
6. Isaiah is describing here what the Israelites literally were doing.
7. They would go out to gather wood for their fire. And some of them would cut down a tree and make it into logs. And half of the wood they would use to build a fire, and the other part of the wood would be carved into an image or idol that they bowed down to.
8. It was a reference to the fact that most of the idols of that time were made from wood.
9. Now wood isn't bad. Wood has never been bad and will never be bad.
10. But this good thing had become an object that caused the people of that day to stumble.
11. One more illustration.

12. In numbers chapter 21, the children of Israel grumbled and complained against God for the thousandth time and God became fed up. So, he caused venomous snakes to come into the camp and bite people. And it says that many people died.
13. The people repented. And as a result, God relented, and he gave Moses the solution to stop the punishment.
14. God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it up on a pole, and that when the people looked at the bronze snake after they had been bitten, the poison wouldn't kill them.
15. So that's what Moses did. And thousands of people's lives were saved. The snake on the pole was a very good thing.
16. Now fast forward several hundred years and listen to what the great Godly king Hezekiah was forced to do.
17. **2 Kings 18:4** He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.)
18. These high places were idol worship sites. The sacred stones and Asherah poles were idols that were worshipped.
19. And then you have the bronze snake. The people had named the snake and held worship ceremonies in honor of the snake.
20. Again, the snake on the pole was not a bad thing. It was a good thing in that it saved many people. But the bronze snake became an idol.
21. When allowing the Holy spirit to point things out in your life, don't be fooled into thinking that the things the Lord points out are going to be bad things.
22. They could very well be good things that we have allowed to have a bad effect on our lives.
23. Another characteristic of idols is that often times they are...

Near and known.

1. You don't have to respond or raise your hand. But how many times when we hear the word idol do we think of some foreign, distant thing.
2. Not something that is physically near us or that we know very well.

3. Oh, idols. I don't have any of those. I don't have any weird, foreign things in my life that are causing me trouble.
4. It's not the far and foreign things but the near and known things that can become our idol.
5. In fact. **The things that can become an idol in our lives are almost always given to us by the Lord.**
6. As it relates to our stomach as our god. Food is a near and known blessing given to us by a loving father.
7. As it relates to the wood that was made into an idol. The wood was a near and know object that was given by the Lord to produce a fire, to keep warm with, and to cook food over.
8. In the case of the bronze snake. This was a near and known thing that had been given by the Lord to save his people.
9. When allowing the Holy spirit to examine your life, be open to Him revealing things that are near and known.
10. Be open to the fact that the idol may be something God has given you as a blessing.
11. And finally. The third characteristic of the idol has to do with...

Our relationship with the thing.

1. Very rarely is the thing what makes it an idol. It is our relationship with the thing that makes it an idol.
2. What do we mean relationship with the thing?
3. One of the ways the enemy works to establish idols in our lives is by trying to distort our relationship with the thing, so that it takes the place of the relationship we should have with the Lord.
4. Satan wants us to look to the thing, rather than the God who created and gave the thing, as our source of hope and fulfillment.
5. Our relationship with the Lord must be based on faith.
6. **Hebrews 11:6** And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.
7. Focus with me on the word rewards.
8. In order to please God, we must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

9. So, our relationship with Christ is based on the fact that we believe that our God rewards us for seeking him.
10. But keep in mind that Satan desires to take God out of the equation. And he attempts to do that by hoping we will believe we can have the reward without God.
11. And so, **the thing begins to be an idol in our life when we start looking to the thing for the reward, rather than the Lord for the reward.**
12. How many are still with me.
13. Let's go back to our three examples. Food. The wood. And the bronze snake.
14. Let's just be clear about my relationship with food. I like food. I like to eat. Eating good food is enjoyable. Eating good food is rewarding.
15. But here's the thing. It is only rewarding because our God gives us the food and gives us the ability to make the food delicious. (loss of taste and smell)
16. The reward is from the Lord and not the food. And if we try and make eating the food the reward, the food, or in this case our stomach becomes an idol.
17. When the people burned the wood there was a reward. It provided warmth and heat. And it provided a source to cook food.
18. But the source of the reward was not in the wood. The power was not in the wood. The source of the reward was the God who made the tree grow in the first place.
19. The wood is just a dead and decaying object that is gone when it is burned up.
20. Looking at the bronze snake provided a reward. It brought healing from the snake bite and it made the venom harmless.
21. But the bronze snake didn't possess any power. The power came from the God who told Moses to put it up there in the first place.

Conclusion: Look at Teresa.

1. **The Old thing.**
2. There is a reason why God told Moses to put the bronze snake up on a pole, and not on the ground.

3. The Lord wanted the people to look up. And as they looked up, what God really wanted them to see and do was look up at him and realize.
4. This God you've been complaining about. He is a good God who loves me and provides for me.
5. And that is the purpose for everything the Lord give us. They are good things meant to bless us.
6. And whatever it is, food, wood, money, wisdom, strength. When we think of those things he wants us to look up to him and recognize that it is Him and not the thing that is of greatest value.
7. Enjoying the thing is not what makes it an idol. What makes it an idol is enjoying the thing, but forgetting to focus on the great God who gave you the thing.
8. Because it is then that we leave God out of the equation.
9. So, as we allow the Holy spirit to examine our lives, I want to encourage you to ask yourself this question.
10. Do the things of life. Do the things I have. Draw me closer to the Lord? Do they make me more thankful? Do they make me more grateful to God? Is it the relationship with the Lord that is rewarding?
11. Or has the thing become the reward in itself.
12. Prayer.
13. Will you open your heart to allow the Holy Spirit to show you about you?
14. Will you allow Him to reveal to you your true relationship with the stuff of life?
15. Pray. Lord I invite you to examine me.
16. I invite you to reveal to me things that could be an idol in my life.
17. With your help, I am willing to change my relationship with the thing so my relationship with you can be what it needs to be.
18. The problem with the thing becoming the reward is that eventually the thing isn't rewarding anymore.
19. Take it from Solomon. No single person on planet earth has ever had or ever will have as much as Solomon.
20. And this was his take on all those things. **Ecclesiastes 1:2**
"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."

