

Idols Exposed

Acts 19:23-27

Preface

Illus: Lindsay Lohan was the cute little girl who starred in the original Parent Trap movie. She played the role of twins who had been separated at an early age when their parents divorced. The twins plotted and successfully got their parents back together. This week at the age of 25 Lindsay Lohan went to jail for numerous violations of driving while intoxicated and failure to comply with probation requirements.

Illus: This week in Lucedale MS, 24 year old boy and his 18 year old girlfriend were arrested on capital murder charges for the death of the George County Sheriff. The boy was being pursued for previous legal matters. As the sheriff was attempting to stop them, they ran over him with their truck. 18 year old Brandy Williams was driving. This young lady had no warrants against her. The police were not even after her. But she will never be free again. She will spend her life in prison and will likely face the death penalty.

We must understand that people need God. People are so easily misguided to pursue the wrong things. We live in a world where people are lured into all sorts of falsehoods.

Scripture

²³ About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way.
²⁴ A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. ²⁵ He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. ²⁶ And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. ²⁷ There is danger not only that our

trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty." Acts 19:23-27 NIV

Introduction

Artemis (Ar-ta-mis) was the goddess of fertility, worshipped by the people of Ephesus and in many other places. Artemis was portrayed as having many breasts which was a symbol of her fertility. It is believed this was all triggered by a meteorite that fell from the sky and had these shapes on it.

Legend taught that Artemis brought the promise of fertility, long life, sexual fulfillment and protection during pregnancy and childbirth. People came from all over to Ephesus to celebrate and participate in festivals in honor of Artemis.

The worship of Artemis was nothing more than a cult embroiled in erotic behavior. It was idol worship at its ugliest.

The dictionary defines an idol as *"any person or thing regarded with blind admiration, adoration or devotion."*

An idol is anything that garners an inappropriate amount of dedication and devotion. Certainly an idol is anything that takes away from our devotion to God.

We must understand some important things about idols.

1. Idols consume our resources

There is a phrase you often hear in the context of criminal investigations – *"Follow the money trail."*

Most crimes and most political scandals trace back to money. People will spin things and cast away their morals when it comes to profits. Example: BP and the value that could have been used.

Demetrius and his friends were making an excellent living selling silver trinkets and statues of Artemis. People foolishly wasted their money on these items.

Demetrius plotted to stir up the people to riot against Paul and other Christians. But the heart of his motive was not religious, it was money. Money was his god, not Artemis.

The same is true today. Many criticize the church and attack the church when their motive is really to profit.

As Christians, we must never make our decisions and judgments based on money but rather on what God would have us do.

Illus: This past week Pam and I were on vacation in North Georgia. A couple of the days we drove over to the next county which is Union County. Union county has been a dry county where alcohol could not be sold. They were to vote last Tuesday on a referendum to allow the sale of alcohol. The billboards and signs were everywhere. The ones against the sale of alcohol had pictures of beer and wine with red Xs on them and read *“Don’t be deceived, Vote No.”* The ones in favor had pictures of green check marks and read *“Vote Yes for Union County Prosperity.”*

Once again, the lie was propelled to the people. “If we don’t have alcohol, we can’t be profitable. If we can’t sell alcohol, we will fall behind everyone else.”

We happened to drive through the town square on Tuesday which was voting day. There were young people standing on the streets with signs that read, *“Vote No for our sake.”*

The measure passed and Union County is no longer a dry county. It didn’t matter that teens will now have access to alcohol. It didn’t matter that people will be killed due to drunk drivers. It didn’t matter that families will be destroyed. **All that mattered was prosperity.**

As Christians we must find the backbone and the faith to set aside our idols and desire for prosperity and do what God would have us do. We must find the faith to say enough is enough.

I have been telling you for years that the day is coming when you will be asked to vote on legalizing gambling in Alabama. Rest assured it will be marketed in the same manner – *“Vote Yes for Alabama’s prosperity.”*

In time, the same will be true with gay marriage and other moral issues that our forefathers never dreamed would be considered.

We need to heed Paul’s words and understand that man made idols are not gods at all.

We must understand that idols sap us of our resources and morals.

2. Idols leave us empty

I want you to think about something for a moment. What happened to the goddess Artemis? Do you ever hear of her today? The answer is no.

Think of all those people who spent money on silver statues of Artemis. What a waste of money. What a waste of effort.

Did anyone ever have their life changed by Artemis? No. Was anyone healed by Artemis? No. Was anyone’s sins forgiven, marriage mended, comforted or strengthened by Artemis? No.

The fact is that Artemis was a false idol. Everyone who fell victim to worshipping her was left completely empty.

Idols go by the wayside and leave us empty and searching for peace. The only lasting peace you and I will ever find will be found in Jesus Christ and Him only.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” vs. 7

Let the peace that Christ can give keep on acting as umpire in your hearts (Col. 3:15) Wms.

Illus: As youth, we were easily suckered into the false promises of idols. "If I can only get out on my own..." "If I can only get this or that, I will have happiness." Remember thinking if you only had a certain car you would be so cool and everyone would think highly of you. A few months later the car is dirty and it no longer brings you happiness.

When we invest our time and resources into idols, we are left with an empty meaningless feeling.

What are some examples of false idols, things we put before our worship of God? Some examples include jobs, careers, money, popularity, children, boats, cars, pleasure, hunting, fishing, etc.

We must learn that our idols are tearing us away from the God who loves us so dearly. We must understand that anything that pulls us away from God is an idol.

All idols leave us empty handed.

3. Idols are nothing in the presence of Christ

Notice that Demetrius was upset because he was seeing a substantial drop in demand for His product. Because of Christ, people were not buying his silver tributes to Artemis.

When people come to know the Jesus Christ, they discover real salvation. As Christians, we can be wise to false idols as a result of our relationship with Christ.

Christ changes our perspective on everything. A Christian has no business wasting his / her resources on junk. We should invest wisely and everything we have should be available for the Lord's work.

"The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever." 1 John 2:17 NIV

"¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" 2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV

As Christians, if Christ is in the right place in our hearts, we will put all other things in their appropriate place. We will not have idols which take precedence over our relationship with God.

Illus: Do you put your own pleasure before God? Do you put your children's pleasure before God? You might answer no but think about it for a moment.

Is having your child participate in a softball or soccer tournament on Sunday more important to you than having them in church?

Is going hunting or fishing more important to you than being in God's house on Sunday?

Is spending your money on the things you desire more important than giving faithfully and obediently to God?

Conclusion

When thinking of Demetrius, I am reminded of Mark 8:36 where Jesus says, *"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"*

Demetrius missed everything that is important. He knew of the teachings of Paul. He even quoted Paul but he missed the message Paul was teaching.

Demetrius was so focused on his own personal desires that He missed what God had in store for him. Demetrius missed out on salvation, forgiveness, abundant life and eternal life.

Perhaps Demetrius could have made silver crosses and given people a reminder of the real God who genuinely loved them.

The message to you today is simple but often difficult. Do not put anything before God. Listen to the Holy Spirit and let absolutely nothing come before Him.