

Intro:

Today we are going to have a message from a long running series I call “Miscellaneous”. We have had sermons in this series off and on through the years.

- I have 35 messages in this category in one database, but there might be a few missing!

Our subject for today is: “the Christian’s proper response to the world.”

I have given the message this title:

Turn Away from Your Idols

As I was thinking about how to introduce this message, I came across a quotation I picked up in our travels not too long ago.

Over the last year and a half, we have had occasion to spend some time in Nashville. One of the places we visited was a place called the Ryman Auditorium. I may have mentioned it to you on an earlier occasion.

The Ryman is best known as the original home of ‘The Grand Ole Opry’ show. But the building didn’t start life as an entertainment center.

- An evangelist by the name of Sam Jones held a revival meeting in Nashville in 1885 at which riverboat captain Thomas Ryman is converted to Christ.
- Ryman decides to build a central tabernacle for Sam Jones and other evangelists to hold revival meetings in Nashville. The building is opened in 1892.
- Over the years many evangelists preach in the building (although it is used for concerts and public events of various kinds). Billy Sunday preached in the Ryman in 1919, the year prohibition went into effect.
- A woman named Lula C. Naff became the general manager of the building in the late thirties. She is instrumental in bringing all kinds of entertainment into the building, including in 1943 The Grand Old Opry. She is credited with the quote that reminded me of our visit to the building. Here is what she said:

“Who wanted to hear Billy Sunday when they could go see Mary Pickford for a dime?”¹

¹ Lula C. Naff — quote displayed at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, TN, original home of the Grand Ole Opry — Naff was former manager of the Auditorium.

Now some of what is and was displayed in the Ryman Auditorium is perfectly acceptable — and some of it isn't. Some of it is clearly and completely of the world.

One early worldly production was brought in by Lula Naff after a court battle in 1939, the play *Tobacco Road*, a wicked depiction of a poor and exploited Southern family.

Now, I use the term “worldly” here. What is “worldly”? What is “worldliness”?

“Worldliness is what any particular culture does to make sin look normal and righteousness look strange.”²

I think that is a pretty good definition.

We are going to look at God's indictment of Judah's culture through the prophet Ezekiel. I want you to think with me about the things God condemns in the people of Judah and how we can draw parallels with our world.

Read Ezekiel 14.1-11

Proposition: God wants you to live a lifestyle committed to turning away from idols.

I. The idolatry of Judah rebuked

A. There are 42 direct references to idols in Ezekiel (in the NAS)

1. 5.11
2. 6.3-7
3. 6.11-14

What is the Lord's attitude towards the idols of Judah?

- He hates them
- He will destroy them
- He will destroy the worshippers of these idols

B. The practices of Judean idolatry

1. The ‘image of jealousy’ in the temple itself (8.3)
 - a. Could have been an Asherah pole, as installed by Manasseh, later removed by Josiah, but likely returned
 - b. Image of fertility

² David Wells, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/newsletter/2004/mar26.html>

2. Images of all kinds of creeping things and detestable animals in a hidden room of the temple (8.10)
 - a. Priests were worshipping these in secret
 - b. Assumed God had abandoned them, were turning to Egyptian idols for protection from Babylon

“What people do when they think no one else can see them reveals their true character.”³

3. Worship of Tammuz by the women (8.14)
 - a. Tammuz is an ancient Sumerian god whose worship is replicated in many ancient cultures
 - b. During the hot summer months when vegetation died off, Tammuz is supposed to die and descend to the underworld
 - c. His followers would weep mourning his death during this time of the year, only to celebrate his revival in the spring when the spring rains came
 - d. As a god of life and death, he is worshipped by fertility rites: *i.e.*, ritual prostitution

After exile, one of the Hebrew months is called *Tammuz*, a remnant of ancient idolatry.

4. Worship of the sun by priests (8.16)
5. Child sacrifice (16.20)
 - a. Children were slaughtered and offered up as food to false idols.
 - b. In Ammon, children were burned alive in the fires of Molech.
 - c. Judah had gone so far (Manasseh himself, son of Hezekiah, descendant of David, was guilty of this sin)

³ Cooper, p. 122, quoted in Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003). Eze 8:12.

6. Judah's idolatries portrayed as a prostitute who pays her customers for their attention (16.30-34)

“Such a reversal was remarkably unusual, thus showing her debased commitment to idolatry and foreign alliances. As she departed from God, He then withheld His blessings that He had so freely given (*cf.* Deut. 28:15-23). Instead of realizing her sin and returning to the true God, she sought out still more gods and offered larger ‘bribes’ to induce these other gods to bless her. Jerusalem was squandering her wealth on things that could not bless.”⁴

The reason I am showing you these passages is to show you not only God's condemnation of Judah, but the degree to which Judah had descended.

How did God's people get to this place?

II. The idolatry of Judah commenced

A. The attractions and appeal of idolatry

1. Idols were associated with political power and national pride
 - a. A conquering nation would seek to instill the worship of its gods (or might be seen to be stronger than ‘our gods’ so their gods would be adopted)
 - b. A king may institute a particular kind of worship (as Jeroboam did) as a national loyalty program
2. Idols were associated with success and prosperity
 - a. Good crops meant the blessing of the gods
 - b. Good business meant the blessing of the gods
 - c. All such blessings were celebrated by excitement, pageant, and carnivals

“Good fun and good feeling.”

“Visible, outward signs, with shows, pageants, parades, have an attraction to the natural heart, which often fails to perceive the unseen spiritual realities.”⁵

⁴ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985). 1:1257.

⁵ William Smith, *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, electronic ed. of the revised ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

3. Idols were associated with all kinds of licentious and sensuous pleasures

“The greatest attraction seems to have been in licentious revelries and obscene orgies with which the worship of the Oriental idols was observed. This worship, appealing to every sensual passion, joined with the attractions of wealth and fashion and luxury, naturally was a great temptation to a simple, restrained, agricultural people, whose worship and laws demanded the greatest purity of heart and of life.”⁶

B. The root of idolatry

1. These men have set up their idols in their heart (14.3)
2. See also 14.4 – God promises to answer them in their heart
 - a. What is the answer? Blindness and further deception — God will allow them to go on in deception, and being deceived
 - b. Ultimately direct, personal, flaming judgement

Idolatry comes about by self-deception. Someone looks at the appealing aspects of the idolatrous thing and thinks “it’s just a festival”, or, “it’s political, just patriotism”, or, “it’s just a little fun”, so he adopts a little bit of it as an “occasional” entertainment.

And slowly, everyone does it, and the whole community becomes enmeshed in wicked practices.

III. The idolatry of Judah a parable

A. What kinds of idols do moderns have?

“The modern objects of idolatry are less gross than the ancient, but are none the less idols. Whatever of wealth or honor or pleasure is loved and sought before God and righteousness becomes an object of idolatry.”⁷

1. Wealth
 - a. On display on television, beautiful people doing beautiful things

⁶ William Smith, *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, electronic ed. of the revised ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

⁷ William Smith, *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, electronic ed. of the revised ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

- b. Envied in political rallies, class warfare rhetoric — “tax the rich”
- c. Possessed by the glamour people, the rock stars, the athletes, the celebrity politicians

2. Honor

- a. Power is honoured, so political and business power is pursued with vigor
- b. Celebrity status is honoured, so young people pursue anything that will gain them celebrity
 - 1) Athletics
 - 2) Clothing that looks like what the stars wear
 - 3) Clothing that is the star itself “brand name wear”

3. Pleasure

- a. The sights and sounds of movies, television, are full of excitement and pageantry and are pursued
- b. The thrill of combat is reproduced for us in the sports arena
- c. The sizzling pleasures of sexuality are trouped before our eyes all too easily
 - 1) Movies and television, yet again
 - 2) Internet
 - 3) Clothing
 - 4) Music

B. So what is the heart issue in our world?

“Worldliness is what any particular culture does to make sin look normal and righteousness look strange.”⁸

“Whatever of wealth or honor or pleasure is loved and sought before God and righteousness becomes an object of idolatry.”⁹

- 1. The person who pursues a close walk with God is thought strange
 - a. He dresses funny (modestly)
 - b. He sings funny (sincerely, simply, sweetly)

⁸ David Wells, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/newsletter/2004/mar26.html>

⁹ William Smith, *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, electronic ed. of the revised ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

c. He acts funny (prays, worships, delights in God's house and God's people)

2. The person who pursues righteousness is persecuted

The one at work who makes all the rest of the workers look bad

3. On the other hand, the worldling makes sin look normal

a. The behaviour of worldly actors/musicians

b. The behaviour portrayed as normal in movie/television/music

c. The things called normal in our world

Just "alternate lifestyles" and many such euphemisms
[euphemism = root means 'good form']

C. And what of our current Christian culture?

1. It imitates the world

a. Sound

b. Dress

c. Language

2. It imitates the world's behaviour

Mars Hill Church — New Year's Eve Red Hot Bash!

Our second annual New Year's extravaganza! Ring in 2008 in Red Hot Style. This New Year's Eve party features internationally known artist, Bobby Medina & his Red Hot Band. This 12 piece big band does it all, from Swing, to Latin to Motown and beyond and are widely considering one of the top dance bands in the Northwest. We'll be transforming our auditorium into a Red Hot Spot, bringing in an enormous dance floor - TWICE as big as last years, refreshments, dessert, champagne, professional photography in an awesome backdrop designed for the event and all the noise-making party favors you could want. Not to mention a dance contest with cash prizes! At midnight, countdown with close to 1000 other revelers with fireworks live from Seattle's Space Needle on the big screens. This is going to be an unforgettable party, with great improvements from last year. Get ready to sizzle!

Pastor Mark Driscoll, Mars Hill Church

A friend sent this description of one of his sermons: 'Sermons - Topical Studies - Vintage Jesus'. Choose 'Week One: 'Is Jesus The Only God?'. To get the full impact, I suggest downloading the video, not just the mpg3 recording. You will note that Driscoll, while 'preaching', is wearing a t-shirt with a picture of 'Jesus' and the caption, 'Jesus Is My Home-Boy'. He describes it as 'Madonna's favorite t-shirt'. He favorably references a number of ungodly sounding movies, using quotes from them to make his points. Based on one movie quote, he says (gesturing as if he is spanking his wife's anatomy) to his wife, '*You're a smokin'-hot wife*'. He seems to be preaching 'another Jesus' which is antithetical to my understanding of Jesus as He is described in Revelation 1 and the reverence due His person and work throughout Scripture.

This church is in Seattle.

But here is the question: how did Christians get here?

- In the 1970s, rock music started entering the churches, the Jesus People were tolerated in their worldly dress and lifestyle, and our young people (me and my generation) thought it was cool to act like the world and still be Christians.

D. Last point of the parable: What does God think about all of this?

^{NAU} **Ezekiel 14:6** ¶ "Therefore say to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord GOD, "Repent and turn away from your idols and turn your faces away from all your abominations. ⁷ "For anyone of the house of Israel or of the immigrants who stay in Israel who separates himself from Me, sets up his idols in his heart, puts right before his face the stumbling block of his iniquity, and *then* comes to the prophet to inquire of Me for himself, I the LORD will be brought to answer him in My own person. ⁸ "I will set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from among My people. So you will know that I am the LORD.
