

Altars Instead Of Idols

I remember playing with legos as a kid. I don't consider myself to be real creative but I can follow instructions...pretty well...better than average anyway. But I remember putting together some of those lego sets where you do a couple steps and you look at what you are building and you can't see the finished product. But as you continue to follow the instructions, eventually you begin to see it taking form, and then finished.

I was the kind of kid that needed to save those instructions or I may never be able to rebuild it if it got torn apart.

Others could just take that box of random legos and build something awesome. I could make a square. But those creative types just start putting blocks together, they don't even know what they are making...sometimes it ends up being something cool, other times they tear it all apart and start over. But it seemed like they were always building something...

And if you could step back and take a look at your life, you would see that you are always building something...many things in fact.

You're building a career, a family, a reputation, relationships, a legacy, and much more.

And in all of these various areas of life that we are constantly building...these things that are good things...we must be watchful and careful that we don't build them into idols.

Last week I talked about when God gives you those "instead" moments and as we continue on in the series INSTEAD, we're going to look at some alternatives to the things we are naturally inclined to do...the things we should do INSTEAD.

Today we are going to look at building Altars Instead Of Idols.

Exodus 20:22-24 (CSB)

Then the Lord told Moses, "This is what you are to say to the Israelites: You have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven. 23 Do not make gods of silver to rival me; do not make gods of gold for yourselves.

24 "Make an earthen altar for me, and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your flocks and herds. I will come to you and bless you in every place where I cause my name to be remembered.

Do not make gods (idols), do make altars. Church, those are not suggestions. They are commands. They are for your good. God knows what we're more likely to do if it's left up to us.

God wants you, for your good, to build altars instead of idols.

I'm afraid that when we hear that, we get an image in our head of the time when Moses went up the mountain to meet with God and the Israelites took all their gold and formed it in the image of a calf to make the infamous golden calf.

Exodus 32:7-8 (NKJV)

And the Lord said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. 8 They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'

They turned away from God's commandments and corrupted themselves. They built the idol, worshiped it and sacrificed to it.

It's easy to judge the Israelites and think we would never build something like this, let alone worship it or sacrifice to it. But we do...it's just not as obvious.

See when they created it, they said to Aaron "come, make us gods that shall go before us"

Idols - something you admire, adore, or are devoted to

Gods - rulers, judges

Everything in your life has the capability to become an idol or god to you. That's up to you.

You can build idols out of them. I'm talking about things that almost everyone has...kids, careers, money, hobbies, friends, sports, cars, achievements...all things that CAN be good things in your life.

How do you know if you've built them into idols? We've got to go back to our first scripture Exodus 20:22-24

Do not make gods of silver to rival me

A rival is something that is competing for the same object or goal as another, or who tries to equal or outdo another

Everyone and everything wants all of you. It's up to you to choose how much of yourself you are willing to give to each thing.

And when you give too much of yourself to something other than Jesus...you've made an idol that is a rival to God. You've made something in your life that's competing with Jesus for your heart, for your time, for your worship.

And we do these things in the name of the American Dream.

What Is the American Dream?

The American dream is the belief that anyone, regardless of where they were born or what class they were born into, can attain their own version of success in a society in which upward mobility is possible for everyone. The American dream is believed to be achieved through sacrifice, risk-taking, and hard work, rather than by chance.

The American dream is about building idols. The American dream, I believe, has a much greater chance of leading you away from Christ than it does toward Him.

Solomon could have had anything he wanted. He didn't ask for riches or status or fame. He asked for wisdom...God's wisdom...to lead God's people. And God gave him that and everything else...

Matthew 6:33 (NKJV)

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Seek God's kingdom, live for Jesus. And everything else you need will be provided out of that relationship with Jesus.

Do not make gods of gold for yourselves.

Do not make idols or gods for yourselves. Listen...Jesus is Lord.
He's the ONLY One who died for you and paid the price for your sins.
He's the ONLY One who rose from the dead, never to die again, offering you new life.
The Bible is true. The Word is God.

Any version of God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit that does not line up with what the bible says...well that's a god you made for yourself. That's an idol.

And idolatry is a sin. A big sin. Because it leads you to a false god that has no ability to save, deliver, heal, or restore. There's a reason both John and Paul warn us about idols:

1 John 5:21 (CSB)

Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

1 Corinthians 10:14 (NKJV)

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

They tell us to keep an eye on idolatry...and run away from it when you see it.

So what do we do? How do we keep from making these good things in our lives into idols?

Build Altars INSTEAD Of Idols

Make an earthen altar for me

Sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your flocks and herds.

I will come to you and bless you in every place where I cause my name to be remembered.

Altars - places where sacrifices are made

Sacrifice - something offered, surrendered, given up

God said if you will build this altar, a place to sacrifice...give up, surrender...IF you will do that...it's conditional.

THEN I will come to you and bless you in every place where I cause my name to be remembered.

We have to be willing to surrender all that we have to the Lord, for His purpose...not just once, but every minute of every day.

In the days this command was given, when the people made idols, they believed that the deity (god) was present in the image.

Now you might think that's crazy, to believe that God is in that golden calf. But people still do it today with physical objects when they think there's some kind of protection or power in an image of a saint or a dream catcher or whatever else.

But people also do it when they make idols out of jobs, kids, hobbies...maybe you don't think Jesus is physically "in it" but that He's involved in it so He's "in it". Right?

He made it possible. He opened the door. He gave it to you. He's in it.

All of that may be true. But just because He's "in it" doesn't mean you can't still make it an idol. Just like those who worship the creation over the Creator.

Yes, God gave you those kids...but not as a replacement for Himself. Not as something that becomes the first priority in your life over your relationship with Him.

Yes, God may have opened the door for your career, but not so you work 24/7 to build something up that is going to burn one day. It's to provide a means to serve Him in your work and in your life...

Yes, God may have given you whatever resources for those hobbies you love, but not so they become an obsession and the desire of your heart...that belongs to Him!

Instead of letting God use those gifts. Use them to bless others, use them to share His heart and gospel. It can become about us and our own agenda.

Then they become idols.

Idols are built when the flesh takes over and there's no room for God.

We've got to offer these things up to the Lord. Build them into altars. God I sacrifice these things...I offer them to You, I surrender them to You. Will YOU show me how to do these things well while still putting You first!

This is the difference between idols and altars. One of them we elevate in our lives, the other we lift up to Jesus.

One of them we lead the way with our own wisdom. The other we let the Holy Spirit guide us with His.

God said to build an altar and then sacrifice on it.
Sacrifice is the center around which all worship revolves.

We sacrifice too much for our kids, jobs, and hobbies. I'm not trying to pick on these things, they are just the few that most Americans idolize without realizing it.

Sacrifices involved offering something valuable as a token of gratitude to God.

They gave up something they liked, something they wanted, something of worth, and they did that because nothing compares to Jesus...and what do we have without Him?

Psalm 115:3-8 (NKJV)

But our God is in heaven;
He does whatever He pleases.
4 Their idols are silver and gold,
The work of men's hands.
5 They have mouths, but they do not speak;
Eyes they have, but they do not see;
6 They have ears, but they do not hear;
Noses they have, but they do not smell;
7 They have hands, but they do not handle;
Feet they have, but they do not walk;
Nor do they mutter through their throat.
8 Those who make them are like them;
So is everyone who trusts in them.

An altar is anything we build for God while an idol is anything we build for ourselves....

Altars are sacrifices we make for God while idols are substitutes we make for God.

What are we building with our lives today? Let's build altars instead of idols!

What are those things today that you need to guard yourself from building into idols

What are those things that you've already built into idols that you need to flee from and offer up to God.

It's a time for surrender, for sacrifice...all I am...all I have...Lord it's Yours.