

ALL THAT GLITTERS

Naming Our Idols | Shiny Objects (Part 1)

Texts: Exodus 20:1-2, 22-24; 2 Kings 17:38-41; Matt 6:21

Driving Toward the Hole

I had a dream that I was roaring down the California coastal highway in a silver turbo-charged convertible with an Italian name. Glancing in my rear-view mirror, I couldn't help but notice how fantastic my Maui Jim sunglasses looked against my spray tan when, all of a sudden, an earthquake hit. With a loud rumble-crack, the pavement in front of my car split wide open. Thanks to the thousands I'd spent on personal trainers and Coolsculpting, my body was magnificently tuned for just such a moment. With ab-muscles crunching and reflexes firing, I managed to spring up and out of the car, just as my gleaming roadster began tumbling into the hole, my "I went to Yale" license plate frame glinting in the sunshine one last time.

And then the dream began a full-on nightmare. As my vehicle fell, it suddenly hit something and turned over violently, spewing oil all over my Armani sweatsuit and slicing off my arm! I went into shock. Just then, another motorist came by and found me staring down into the pit, crying out: *"Oh no, my car! My car!"* *"Your car?!"* said the motorist. *"How can you be crying about that? You just lost your arm, man!"* In a daze, I looked down at where my arm should have been. My eyes widened in horror as the seriousness of my situation became clear: *"Oh no, my Rolex! My Rolex!"*

OK, I didn't really have that dream. But, if truth be told, there are probably some things about the appetites that scenario suggests that run a little too close to home for me. I am a follower of Jesus. I am someone genuinely interested in living my life according to the principles and priorities that Jesus called the Kingdom of God. But I am also attracted to SHINY OBJECTS. Surrounded by all that glitters in American society, all that beckons and begs me to make IT the source of my security, status, and significance, I get distracted from God and the abundant life to which I want to be devoted. Am I alone in this?

Worshipping Idols

When we read the Bible, it becomes clear that this is not a new condition. Long ago, the children of Israel were making their way toward the Promised Land when God stopped them in their tracks and gave them, through his servant Moses, a set of instructions that came to be known as the Ten Commandments. How many of you have heard of those? Here's how they begin. **And God spoke these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (Ex 20:1-2).**

Now, let's stop right there, because these words set the context for everything that follows. Here's the text or Tweet version: "I don't want you to be slaves." "I hated it when you were back there in Egypt chained to masters that didn't care about you. I hated it when you were crushed and burdened and owned by others. That's why I got you out of Egypt and on this road to a life of real milk and honey.

And then God goes on to give the Israelites ten instructions about how to enter that Promised Land. He gives them clues on how to avoid giving your life to dead things, and how to reverence the Source of your life, and how to avoid burning out yourself or the people you influence. God lays out instructions for doing right by your elders, and preserving life, and not messing up your marriage. In the remaining commandments, God advises us on becoming respectful, truthful, contented people. The Ten Commandments are such stunningly relevant instructions for building the best kind of life and society that, I don't know, maybe we should put them up on our walls.

But the very first commandment is the most important one. In fact, it is the key to fulfilling all of the other ones. God's first instruction is: **You shall have no other gods before me. (Ex 20:3)** Be devoted to Me first, because it will be your relationship with Me that will supply you with the grace, wisdom, and power you need to live into your life's potential. And whatever you do, **Do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold. (Ex 20:23)**. Do not get distracted from Me and the great life I want to give you by worshipping SHINY OBJECTS.

In biblical times, there was a different word for what we're calling SHINY OBJECTS. The word is "IDOL." Author Michael Slaughter says that *"An idol is anything that receives the primary focus of my energy or resources, which should belong to God."* *"Idols are good gifts of God to which we assign a wrong priority."* Is there anything in your life or mine that fits that description? Nah, idolatry is a practice that only primitive, pagan people get involved with. **[YouTube Video: Skit Guys - Idol Worship]**.

Yes, sports can become God to some people. It's why we started a Saturday night service for those of us distracted by youth sports, the shimmering golf links, and early Bears games! Our political tribe or family comforts can be an idol. We have television temples now to musical celebrities. It's not an accident that it's called "American Idol." I for one tune into "The Voice" religiously, mindful there was a time when people heard that term and thought of God not Blake Shelton. How many of you might acknowledge that these screens of ours are among the SHINIEST OBJECTS ever? So are the massive industries pushing sex and youth at us. So are our online and physical shopping centers.

On one level, these are all good gifts of God. But when we assign to them a wrong priority and primacy they betray us. They eat up the time and energy that we might have put into worshipping God, reading his Word, building deep relationships with

others, savoring the staggering natural beauty and complexity the Creator has sown into the Creation, or addressing the important servant needs of this world. Most of our kids aren't going to be D1 athletes and their lives will be less because they missed out on developing a lasting relationship with Jesus and a Christian worldview. Most of us would be far better off having deeper marriages and friendships than being slightly better or more knowledgeable about whatever else we worship. Worship, you see, isn't a once-a-week, 75 minute activity; it's the orientation we bring to life 24/7. This is why, perhaps, the most important, kind, and controversial question I could ask today is: What are YOUR idols? Who or what do you really put first?

Our Devotion Matters to God

Do you remember that dream of me driving along in that shiny car, rejoicing in my golden appearance and glittering degrees? I wasn't just kidding. I get seduced by this stuff too. I am tempted to root my sense of security and significance in these false gods, though I am embarrassed to admit that. I tell myself at times: *"I'm not truly devoted to these SHINY OBJECTS. I've just diversified my attention a bit."* But I find that as I give in to distractions that then become dominating forces in my life. How about you?

Let me be blunt because not enough Christians and churches are these days: God commands us to make Him alone the object of our devotion. We can have many interests but only one true inspiration, one FIRST LOVE. Long ago, the nation of Israel was infiltrated by a variety of foreign spiritual and cultural practices that gradually took over the moral vision and life of the people there. God sent his prophets to say to them: **Do not forget the covenant I have made with you, and do not worship other gods. Rather, worship the Lord your God; it is he who will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies. (2 Kings 17:38-39).**

Here's the application: God wants us to make a "covenant" with him – an exclusive vow of loyalty to him above all others (as in marriage). There is a word for when someone is supposedly in a marriage covenant but then chooses to get distracted by diversifying his or her love interests. That word is "adultery" and it rhymes with "expensive divorce"! In the Deuteronomy 5 version of the First Commandment, God says that he is "jealous."

We hear that word today and think "insecure." But the original Hebrew word for "jealous" more properly means "passionately invested." God tells Israel that he is all in with them. He is committed to protecting and providing for them and helping them build a more abundant life than any shiny idol can possibly deliver. So, the first problem with getting distracted and letting God slide down our priority list is that it affects HIM. It hurts the heart of the One who loves us and gave us life. It enflames his jealousy and damages the intimacy we could have with him.

Our Devotion Matters to Others

But there is also a second problem when we get comfortable with idolatry and the people of Israel experienced that too. 2 Kings 17 reads: **They would not listen, however, but persisted in their former practices. Even while these people were worshiping the Lord, they were serving their idols (2 Kings 17:40).** And here's the key lesson: **To this day their children and grandchildren continue to do as their ancestors did (2 Kings 17:41).**

Do you know what's really dangerous about getting comfortable with a life that is distracted by SHINY OBJECTS rather than devoted to God? Other people notice it. Our neighbors and workmates notice what we really put first. Our kids do too. They not only notice it; they imitate it. Our kids don't adopt our aspiring proclamations; they adopt our actual priorities. More often than not, our kids will reproduce in their lives what we are truly passionate about.

When I was a child, my mother made a priority of bringing me to church on the weekend. She went to Sunday School and I went to Sunday School. She then attended a worship service which I then attended. I saw her reading the Bible at home and so, one summer during Vacation Bible School, I started reading the Bible and memorizing verses for myself. Later, as some of you know, I would walk away from the faith. But I think that one of the reasons I came back to it, was because I saw at a young age that it had been not just an aspirational value but an actual priority for her.

It's never too late for a parent to set that example for their kids or any of us to set that example for the others who watch us. My friend, Brian, was 64 years old when he rededicated his life to Christ and resolved to make Him, and his work through Christ Church his number one devotion. Brian didn't have much time. Pancreatic cancer is a ruthless enemy. But the witness of his extraordinary generosity, profound humility, and faithful courage, turned the hearts of many of us toward God.

How do you know what your actual priority is? Check your calendar. Where and how you spend your time will help you identify what you worship. Check your financial expenditures too. It isn't called a "checkbook" for nothing! Jesus told 16 of his 38 parables about money and taught more on the subject of what we do with our financial resources than on any other topic except faith, because he knew that **Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matt 6:21).**

Move from Distraction Toward Devotion

As you go forth today, I know you will be pressed on all sides to pursue a mainly material life – a life whose constant clamoring cry is: "I want, I need, I have, I keep." But, remember, all that glitters is not gold. An earthquake is coming to every one of us

that will swallow up all that we've been driving and we will know then that true LIFE was never in the SHINY OBJECTS. Those idols were merely Fool's Gold.

But Jesus offers us the real thing. **I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10)**, he says. He wants us to know peace, joy, love, faith, and fulfillment. But that life only comes by putting him FIRST. He wants our covenant devotion to him – our passion to please him – to be the filter by which we decide how to handle the urges, the time, the relationships and resources of our life.

This is why it's important to spend time in a service like this on the weekend, or in a small group during the week, or engaging in Bible study or prayer or devotions on your own. All of us need to keep refocusing ourselves on the One who asks to be our First Love. It is through spiritual commitments like these that we build our devotion to Him and wean ourselves from our distraction with all those Shiny Objects.

Let's pray together...