

Who's your idol? By Martin Huburn

Good morning my dear adelphoi,
this morning we are continuing through the sermon series on the book of Amos. In the last sermon we looked at the neighbours of Israel and how they were continuing to lack moral guidance and lack God in their lives. Today we will be looking at Judah in Amos 2:4 – 5 and asking ourselves “Who is our idol?”

I heard a story once about a Sunday school teacher that came in one day to teach their class and offered everyone in the class either £20 or an old and tatty Bible. All but one child selected the crisp £20 note. But the one girl said “can I have the Bible please.” As the child sat down, she opened up the worn Bible and discovered that the Bible had a £5 note in between every single page.

So many people choose things based on their face value. And in the world, these material objects and possessions and many temporary pleasures have become so much more important to them than God and His word.

So let me ask you, **“Who's your idol?”**

Last time, we looked at the pattern of Amos's rebuke and this pattern continues in Amos 2: 4 – 5 and now the message is getting closer to home.

Amos's sermon is still to the people of Israel and Amos is now referring to his own nation of Judah, who was another rival of Israel.

Let us see what it says in Amos 2: 4,

⁴ This is what the Lord says:

“For three sins of Judah,

even for four, I will not relent.

Because they have rejected the law of the Lord

and have not kept His decrees,

because they have been led astray by false gods,

the gods their ancestors followed.”

Let me break this down,

Amos 2: 4,

These are the words of God not of Amos.

The people of Judah were sinning time and time again.

God is going to punish these people for continuing in their sinful ways.

The people of Judah were no longer following God or keeping His decrees, many of their people had been led astray by false gods and idols that their ancestors had idolised.

Let us take a quick look at how they got here and what 'law' they had rejected.

Deuteronomy 5:1

¹ "Moses summoned all of Israel and said,

"Hear O' Israel, the decrees and the laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them"."

In Exodus, God gave the people of Israel, through Moses, laws and decree's that were to be followed. Moses then reminds the people of Israel of these ten commandments.

In Deuteronomy 5: 7 – 8 ,it says,

⁷ "You shall have no other god's before me.

⁸ "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in the heaven above or on the earth below."

These are the laws that the people of Judah had rejected and were no longer following. They put other gods or idols before God and these idols were either manmade or created by God.

In I Kings 9: 6 – 7,

⁶ "But if you or your sons turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods or worship them

⁷ then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then be subject of ridicule among all peoples."

God was warning King Solomon not to get involved with foreign women because of their ungodly practices.

But even though God warned Solomon, he was led astray, in I Kings 11: 4, it says:

⁴ "As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart towards other gods, his heart was not devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David, his father had been."

See Solomon's heart was full of lust towards these women that led him astray.

At the time Judah were part of God's chosen people of Israel but during the reign of Solomon's son, Rehoboam, Judah had rejected God. Rehoboam followed in his father's lustful footsteps and his arrogance led to Israel dividing into two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

Then Rehoboam let the Judean people erect pagan places of worship and pagan alters all around Judah.

Judah's leaders had fallen into other methods of worship and faith and they became more interested in putting their trust and faith into many false gods.

In the years leading up to the time of Amos's ministry, Many Kings of Judah weren't pleasing in the Lords eyes. But some Kings were, and in Amos 1: 1 it mentions Amos's ministry was during King Uzziah's reign in Judah.

2 Kings 15: 1 – 4 – Uzziah or as some translations say Azariah.

¹ "In the 27th year of the reign of King Jeroboam II of Israel. Uzziah son of Amaziah became king of Judah ² at the age of sixteen, and he ruled in Jerusalem for fifty-two years. His mother was Jecoliah from Jerusalem. ³ Following the example of his father, he did what was pleasing to the LORD.

⁴ But the pagan places of worship were not destroyed, and the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there.”

Uzziah was a King that was right in the Lord’s eyes, but he still failed to get rid of the pagan places of worship. And Idolatry continued to be a problem.

What were these idols and other gods?

Some people made figurines and statues made from wood, bronze or gold

Isaiah 44:17

¹⁷ “And the rest of it he makes into a god, his graven image; he falls down to it and worships, and prays to it, and says, Deliver me! For you *are* my god.”

And some people were worshipping false gods such as Baal and Molech

Jeremiah 32: 35

³⁵ “And they built the high places of Baal, in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech; which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.”

And Dagon

Judges 16:23

²³ “Then the lords of the Philistines gathered in order to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. For they said, our god has delivered Samson our enemy into our hand.”

Many people still struggled with idols and false gods in the New Testament, such as Hermes and Zeus who the people thought Paul and Barnabas were in Acts 14. In Acts 17, the men in Athens had alters for many gods including one to an unknown god, just in case they had missed one.

Idolatry was a big issue back then, just as I believe it is today.

No, they didn’t have cars, the internet or even Google back then. They were worshipping lifeless statues, people false gods and animals. But I think it’s interesting that most people today put their trust and faith into things that cannot be taken with us into the next life. We so often put our hopes in people and or temporary things that so frequently let us down.

Let us look at some of today’s idols.

The “X-Factor.”

This has become one of the most popular T.V. events of the present day. People follow the programme religiously and watch every single episode from the audition stages all the way through to the finals and it has become one of the most talked about topics on a Monday morning at the work place.

I’m sure almost everyone here has at least seen one episode but if you haven’t, it’s a musical talent show where the viewers vote for their favourite act. The concept started with Pop Idol here in Britain and American Idol in the USA and it has led to the rise of big names such as Kelly Clarkson and Leona Lewis.

The show runs for about 16 weeks which includes the talent auditions. And to vote for your favourite act, the viewer has to call a premium rate phone number to register a vote.

Then the act with the least votes get eliminated, usually one act per week.

Now I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with the show, but what happens when it becomes the most important thing in your life? Putting everything else on hold to make sure you don't miss an episode? Ask yourself this question,

“Does God get this much dedication from you?”

In fact Paul says in Romans 12: 1 – 2,

“¹ So then, my brothers, because of God's mercy to us, I urge you to offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, **dedicated to His service and pleasing to Him. This is the true worship that you should offer. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will.”**

In other words we need to be dedicated to serving and pleasing God. We can't be following things like X factor or anything else religiously, however we do need to have this dedication and commitment to serving the LORD.

Another area we need to be careful of idol worship is sports, especially Football. Professional football is the most popular sport across the world. There are more professional and semi professional football leagues across the world than all the other sports leagues combined. The media play a huge part in the marketing of football, especially the big leagues and tournaments and marketing the top stars all around the world.

So, it is no surprise that most boys will grow up with the dream and desire to become a professional footballer.

This has led also to a fanatical following of the teams and its players.

This closely resembles the old days of Scotland and its various clans or families. The people within the clans sported their family tartan to show where their loyalties lie. Just like this, football fans are very passionate about the colours they wear and the team it represents. There is so much emphasis on local rivalries and who is going to be the better team.

Paul says in Ephesians 4: 20 – 24 says

²⁰ “That is not what you learnt about Christ! ²¹ You certainly heard about Him, and as His followers you were taught the truth that is in Jesus. ²² So get rid of your old self, which made you live as you used to – the old self that was being destroyed by its deceitful desires. ²³ Your hearts and minds must be made completely new, ²⁴ and you must **put on the new self, which is created in God's likeness and reveals itself in the true life that is upright and holy.**

Paul say's “put on your new self”, see we are now part of Jesus' team.

Are we willing to show people our devotion and allegiance to God?

And just like all walks of life, Football has its many heroes and villains. And the majority of the time it is usually the same person, doing amazing things one minute and the next they are making a fool of themselves.

But yet, so many people worship the ground that these people walk or run on.

For example,

Wayne Rooney.

His overhead kick goal against rivals Manchester City was classed as majestic amongst his many peers but what about his on field conduct which is also a big talking point.

His antics at the 2010 world cup were like the actions of a spoilt child. He throws a temper tantrum any time he doesn't get his own way.

And the way he held Manchester United to ransom not too long back was totally mercenary like. He showed no loyalty to the club or its supporters until there was money involved.

And it's not just in football, but in all sports and entertainments, people take advantage of their position of ambassadorship. I pray that professionals realise the privilege of the position they are in. Many people, especially kids look up to these so called 'professionals', and I believe they should be setting a good example for them.

Let me ask, as Christians and ambassadors for Christ, are we setting a good example by our conduct for the people watching us?

Philippians 1: 27

²⁷ " Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence I will know that you stand firm in your faith of the gospel."

Paul is telling us to conduct ourselves in a way that reflects Jesus so that when people see us they know we are followers of Christ. And I believe it isn't for our benefit but it's actually for theirs.

There are so many other idols in the world we live in, such as: -

Idol's and Diva's and heart throbs.

Role models of the world today. Rhianna, Cheryl Cole, Peter Andre, Brad Pitt or even David Caruso.

Music.

Many types of music promote anger, depression, pride and self justification through the lyrics of the songs.

Facebook and the internet.

The youth of today are addicted to the internet and to social networking.

Materialism

Cars; Money and jobs; Possessions – Gadgets and technology.

Addictions.

Drugs, alcohol, pornography.

So which one of these is your idol?

See Amos 2: 4 says

⁴ “This is what the Lord says:

“For three sins of Judah,

even for four, I will not relent.

Because they have rejected the law of the Lord

and have not kept His decrees,

because they have been led astray by false gods,

the gods their ancestors followed.”

Have we been led astray by these many things? Because God wants us to be committed and devoted to Him.

I remember when I bought my Japanese import, 94 Toyota Celica, I was so excited as it was one of those cars that I'd wanted since I was young. I idolised that car because it is regarded as a pretty cool sports car. And I remember when I was in my teens, I was one of the first people to have a Super Nintendo games system. So many things make us so cool, don't they?

We so frequently rise up and hold these many idols with such high regard, but these idols can't give us eternal life.

However, Jesus tells us in John 3: 14 -15.

¹⁴ “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the dessert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,

¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him.”

Without fault or blame, Jesus shed His blood for us, only Jesus deserves to be put on a pedestal so high up. But when Jesus was lifted up onto the cross at Calvary, God had put Jesus there on a pedestal to remind us of what He has done for us. Jesus should be the only thing we hold up in high regard

Jesus continues in John 3: 16,

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

God loves us that much, that if we believe in Jesus and what He did, we can have everlasting life. Please don't be like the people of Judah, let us remember who God is and what He has done for us. Instead, Let us be like Joshua and choose to serve God.

Joshua 24: 14 – 15,

¹⁴ “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the river and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then chose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

See we cannot serve the LORD, our God when the devotion of our hearts are on these many things that surround us today. Joshua is saying we are surrounded by idols, some are pretty, some are tempting and some seem miraculous. Look I understand that serving the LORD may be hard work or even challenging, so you carry on doing what you want, but me and my family will worship God.

So let me ask us all today, **who are we going to serve today?** God or idols?
Because if it is God we choose, we need to throw away these idols.

Joshua 24: 19 – 20 says

¹⁹ “Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. ²⁰ If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after He has been good to you.”

While these idols are in our hearts, we are incapable of serving God.

Joshua 24: 21 - 22 says,

²¹ But the people said to Joshua, “No! We will serve the LORD.”

²² Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD.”

“Yes, we are witnesses” replied the people.”

As I’m sure all of us answered when I asked “Who are we going to serve?” The answer was God. So just like Joshua said, we have all been witnesses against ourselves today that we have also chosen God.

Joshua then goes on to say in 24: 23,

²³ “Now then,” Said Joshua, “throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.”

Joshua is telling us that we need to get rid of these many things in our lives and turn our hearts and devotion to God.

And it’s not just worshipping idols either,

Paul tells us in Ephesians 5: 3 – 5,

³ “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or of greed because these are improper for God’s holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

See Paul tells us here that immoral, impure and greedy people are also idolaters these things hinder our relationship with God and such people are not fit to enter the kingdom of Christ and God.

So are we prepared to get rid of all these things that hinder our relationship with God?

Because Amos tells us what will happen if we don’t in Amos 2: 5 says

⁵ I will send fire upon Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem.”

Amos is telling us today that if we continue to put these many things before God, He is going to punish us. Keep away from these many things that distract us from God, be careful of what we are devoting ourselves to, who we are following.

So let me challenge all of us today to get rid of these many false gods and keep our devotion for the LORD.

Remember my adelphoi, keep going, keep growing and keep making a difference. God bless.