

Jonah: Wrestling with Grace

Week 2: Jonah 2

November 3, 2013

Good morning/intro stuff

Guests: glad you're here, our vision is connecting people to God and each other, hope you experience a bit of both of those things

Especially if this is your first time ever to church or first time in a long time, glad you're here and hoping you'd come this morning

Praying that today starts a journey for you that ends with you knowing a good God in heaven who loves you

Before we jump into what we're going to talk about this morning I want to encourage you to check out our book for this fall "The Good and Beautiful God" and to jump into our book discussion on November 17th during the 9:15 service

We're doing this because we know that there's a bunch of obstacles to reading and applying good books:

1. You can think you'll want to get around to buying the book but never get around to it.
2. You can buy it but never get around to reading it
3. You can read it but never get around to applying it

We're hoping that having a goal to have finished the book by and having some space to discuss it will help overcome all those obstacles

So stop by and pick up the Good and Beautiful God, \$10 at the book table with lots of other great resources.

Well if you weren't here last week, you should hop on our website and listen on-line or watch the video

We kicked off our short series on Jonah last week with Jonah chapter 1

If you're not familiar with the Bible, Jonah is a guy in the Old Testament, about 800 years before Jesus

And he's a prophet who God speaks to and he in turn passes along messages to the people

And at the beginning of Jonah 1, God gives Jonah a very unique call to go to his enemies up in Nineveh and proclaim God's word to them

And that word is an emphatic NO to them and to all their wickedness and evil.

And we talked about how whenever God says NO in the Scriptures or in our experiences, whenever God says “Thou shalt not” or “Don’t do that” or whenever he shuts a door or re-directs our paths

God’s NO always and only exists to serve his larger YES.

So God says to Jonah, go tell my NO that serves my larger YES to the Ninevites,
BUT JONAH doesn’t want anything to do with speaking God’s message to the enemies of Israel

So he gets in a boat and goes in the opposite direction away from Nineveh and toward Tarshish, which is coastal Southern Spain

Jonah runs from God’s call, but God refuses to let him off the hook that easily—because God’s YES to Nineveh was his YES to Jonah as well

God is inviting Jonah to come along with him and go to work with him, and this is a gift to Jonah

So when Jonah says “NO” to that invitation, God says “NO” to Jonah’s no and he sends a storm that about destroys the boat Jonah’s on

Jonah has the sailors throw him overboard and the storm immediately stops and God appoints a fish to swallow Jonah whole

And Jonah is in the belly of this huge fish for three days and three nights
And that’s where we left him last week and where we’ll pick up today

Now, I’ve been in some tight or hard or down spots in my life at various points
and I’m sure most of you have been in some tight or hard or down spots at points in your life

But I’m not sure that any of us have been quite as low as Jonah here in the belly of the fish!

I don’t know what you do when you’re in a dark or hard time, but I’ve got a couple of practices that are important to me

One I’ve shared with you before—when I’m in a time of funk or real stress, one of the first things that I do is

Listen to Christmas music. I can’t really explain how or why—I think I just always liked Christmas and somehow I found it harder to be moping around when there was Christmas music playing in the background.

over the years, two great works

The first is Handel's Messiah—some of the greatest Scriptures ever written after Scripture of promises put to some of the most beautiful music ever written by white people!

And the second recommendation I would have in terms of works that have ministered most deeply to my soul during hard times would be "Charlie Brown's Christmas album."

Absolutely some of the best and soul-filled Christmas music ever written—life-changing, especially in hard times.

Now the other habit or practice I've continued since that break-up and hard time was praying the Psalms.

In the midst of my pain and hurt and heartache, I found that the Psalms put words to things that I was feeling but couldn't figure out how to articulate.

And one of the refrains that I found most useful and helpful for me in the Psalms was this deep question:

does God care about me? Will he come to help me? Does he hear my cries for help?

You ever ask that question? Ever wondered if God heard you? Ever wondered if God cared or remembered you?

Christian or not, have you ever wondered if God was there and if he was willing or able to help you?

This morning, I want us to join Jonah, in the belly of this fish because of his own disobedience, as he wonders some of the same things and see what he does and how God responds to him.

Jonah 2 (NIV)

1 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish,

Pause right there.

One of the ironies throughout Jonah is that everything and everyone else is responsive to God's call except Jonah.

In Jonah 1 the storm obeys God, the fish obeys God, the sailors are praying, the captain wakes him up to pray but Jonah does not pray.

But the only thing that will bring Jonah to prayerful engagement with God is being inside the fish.

Here's the question for us tonight: what does it take to get YOU to pray? More likely to pray in crisis or when things are smooth?

Let me exhort you here: God desires for all your life to be fueled by intimacy with him. If the only thing that will drive you toward intimacy with God is crisis, you can expect plenty of crisis in your life!

It took a near-death experience to bring Jonah to prayer, let it not be so with us, AMEN?

2saying,

*(A) "I called out to the LORD, out of my distress,
and he answered me;*

(B) out of the belly of Sheol I cried,

(C) and you heard my voice.

That's sort of a summary statement—Jonah's following a poetic form where he starts by saying the same thing twice in two different ways and this is his thesis: I was in trouble and God saved me

Sheol is the ancient Hebrew word for the place of death and judgment, it's the OT understanding of hell

*3(D) For you cast me into the deep,
into the heart of the seas,
and the flood surrounded me;*

*(E) all your waves and your billows
passed over me.*

*4(F) Then I said, 'I am driven away
from your sight;*

*(G) yet I shall again look
upon your holy temple.'*

*5(H) The waters closed in over me(I) to take my life;
the deep surrounded me;*

weeds were wrapped about my head

6at the roots of the mountains.

I went down to the land

whose bars closed upon me forever;

*yet you brought up my life from the pit,
O LORD my God.*

*7When my life was fainting away,
I remembered the LORD,
(P) and my prayer came to you,
into your holy temple.*

*8(K) Those who pay regard to vain idols
(L) forsake their hope of steadfast love.
9(M) But I with the voice of thanksgiving
will sacrifice to you;
what I have vowed I will pay.*

*(N) Salvation belongs to the LORD!"
10And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.*

AFTER WHICH HE MOST DEFINITELY NEEDED A GOOD BATH! NO DRINKING DIRTY BATH WATER, JONAH!

This past summer I met with a man who was just starting to come to the church and he was in significant funk and depression

He was a small business owner and the small business was barely hanging on, there were financial pressures everywhere
and things in his personal life at home were also difficult

And he was sort of making his way back to intentional connection with God and back into church after some time away
and we talked about prayer—and I suggested to him that he read a Psalm a day and learn how to pray through the Psalms

So he started doing this, and over time as he prayed and his connection with God grew, the Lord did some amazing stuff

And it doesn't always happen like this, but over the span of several weeks into this fall, his depression lifted and his whole internal world shifted

And what's so amazing about it was not much has changed—business is still on the brink, there are still stressors at home and at work

But what's different is what God's been doing in him on the inside to shift his perspective and to build his life on something bigger than circumstances

And this past week we connected again and he told me that he was still reading through the Psalms each day

And he's reading on his Ipad so he had no idea how many of these things there were!

But every day he finds at least one phrase or part of it to underline or highlight.

And his goal at the end of it is to go through and make a patchwork Psalm out of every one of those highlights

To pull it all together and kind of make a quilt of the Psalms that God has met him through during this season— isn't that cute? I encouraged him to consider making some booties and a cute scarf to go with it!

Well Jonah here makes his own quilt in this prayer.

Almost every line of this prayer is taken from, borrows from, riffs off of or 100% plagiarizes the Psalms

Jonah, like all good priests or prophets during this time, has spent literally hundreds, maybe thousands of hours reciting and singing the Psalms and when he's in the dark, in the depths, without a Bible or a light

He prays from a deep well of Scripture that's stored in his heart and in his mind.

In American culture we really value originality, spontaneity, heart-felt original prayer. That's great.

But ever been in a place where you just didn't know how to pray? Just couldn't bring yourself to pray? Didn't have the words or ability to put words around what feeling?

Let me encourage you: give yourself an early Christmas present and spend the next 6 weeks learning to pray the Psalms.

I want to encourage you this week to read through the Psalms until you find one that really resonates with you.

And then start to memorize it—one line at a time. I know, I know, you stink at memorizing, everyone says that.

But there's a whole bunch of stuff that you've memorized

You've memorized how to drive home from here, you've memorized t.v. show theme songs, you've memorized sports statistics, you've memorized what your wardrobe season is on the color wheel

All that is in interest and repetition—you want to know about that and you expose yourself enough to it that you learn it.

1. Find a Psalm that connects with you and that draws you in and puts some words around something you've experienced or that captures something about God that speaks to you

And then 2. repetition—read one sentence out loud, then read it again and again and again, then put your finger in the page, close the Bible, and say it as best you can, look back, try it again

Do that for about 10 minutes a day and you'll memorize a portion of a Psalm in about a week; so that when you're in the pit of despair, you, too, have words to pray

This is an incredible prayer and we could spend all day walking through it but instead going to look at a couple of pieces of this and really drill down into it.

First off, Jonah starts with his thesis statement and I want to make sure we understand how this works:

*"I called out to the LORD, out of my distress,
and he answered me;
(B) out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
(C) and you heard my voice.*

These two lines are called parallelism—the psalms do this all the time; where Jonah is saying the same thing in slightly different ways, this is his overview of what has happened to him.

Jonah here prays for the first time and he's celebrating that when he was about to drown and die, God delivered him and saved him through this smelly fish

Noah in his day had an ark and was delivered by floating ON the water; Jonah here has his own personal SUBMARINE and he's been delivered under-water

Sheol is the ancient Hebrew term for the place where the dead went who were permanently separated from God—it was the OT version of hell

[PPT] All through Jonah 1, Jonah's flight to Tarshish, to earthly beauty and paradise, was described as running from the presence of the Lord

The depths of Sheol, if he had actually died, would have been the successful outcome, the logical fruition of his intentions to run from the presence of the Lord, and yet it would not have been so successful, would it?

Jonah celebrates that he's been saved—been saved from his own death and drowning, for sure

but even more importantly than that, Jonah's been saved from his own willfulness, from himself

What has God had to do to save you from you? What kinds of ways has God had to move or act in your life to stop you from your own bent-ness towards self-destruction?

See, if Jonah had made it to Tarshish, if he had actually succeeded in having what he was striving for, it would have been spiritual death for him

he would have succeeded in running away from every good gift that God had for him, most importantly, the gift of being with his Good Father

And even though he'd be hanging out on the beach without a care in the world and living the 21st century dream of a permanent vacation, it would have only all loss, all death, all emptiness.

We forget that, don't we? I forget it.

There are things that come along on a regular basis that I start to become enamored with that draw my affections and attentions away from the presence of the Lord

and I forget that if I actually succeeded in having that thing, whatever it is, and I lost God, that would be all loss, no matter what I got in exchange.

My friends, ANYTHING for you that results in YOUR separation from God's presence is loss, it's death, it's worthless

even if it's wrapped in 24 karat gold, even if it's wrapped in much money or success or power or other people's approval or all the alcohol you could drink or all the revenge on people that you don't like that you can imagine

In Jonah's case, the place where Jonah needed to go to EXPERIENCE God's presence in a positive way was in Nineveh for him—he ended up experiencing God's presence in a discipline kind of way when we went the opposite direction

But to experience the fullness of God's "YES" to him and to get all of the goodness of God that he could possibly handle, Jonah needed to go to Nineveh—did Nineveh look particularly spiritual or holy from the outside? No!

Nineveh didn't look like a particularly holy place or place where someone would meet the God of the universe, it looked pretty evil

But given God's call to Jonah, the place where Jonah was going to meet God and be in his presence was Nineveh

But he ran from that call and God was good to throw him into the deep waters and alert him to the fact that his path was leading him down a road that he didn't actually want to experience

The point of all of Jonah's life was not Jonah and it wasn't Jonah's comfort or personal preferences

The point of Jonah's life was to be with God, to live in God's presence and share in his mission and then be with him into eternity all of his days

Jonah ran the opposite direction of that call and he was on the doorstep of the permanent separation from God and God's presence BUT THE LORD was good to save him from himself.

And as he's sinking down into the depths, he cries out to God and hear this my friends: "THE LORD HEARD HIM."

We talked earlier about the question over these key points in our lives: does the Lord hear me? Is he attentive to my cry or call?

The good news from Jonah to that very important question is "YES!"

Yes, the Lord DOES hear your cry, even when you're in the depths of despair and pain due to your own disobedience
is Jonah a victim? No! He did this to himself, he's run from God's call!

Does that disqualify him from hearing God's call? NO! Even though Jonah's in this near-death spot because of his own disobedience, God hears his prayer

That's good news to you and to me this morning—Jonah opens his prayer with basically an overview of what has happened to him:

*"I called out to the LORD, out of my distress,
and he answered me;
(B) out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
(C) and you heard my voice.*

And the rest of the passage through verse 7 is Jonah poetically and dramatically re-telling the story of what happened

This is also very much like the Psalms which regularly rehearse stories of God's faithfulness in poetic and creative ways

And Jonah tells us not only that God heard his cry for help as he was sinking down and in his time of distress, he answered his prayer and delivered him.

And now that Jonah has been delivered, even by a rather unconventional method, starting in verse 8, he makes a turn toward the present and the future

Let's look at verse 8:

ESV: **8** Those who pay regard to vain idols

forsake their hope of steadfast love.

*NIV: Those who cling to worthless idols
forfeit the grace that could be theirs.*

Let's define idols: a good thing turned into an ultimate thing
thereby forfeiting the infinite grace of God AND losing the proper value and
use of the good thing.

In Jonah's culture and in his time, they had literal pieces of wood that they would
carve and declare those to be gods.

That's taking a good thing—wood—and making it an ultimate thing—God.

Anything wrong with wood? No! Wood is a good thing—when it's put to its proper
use, wood is a gift to us.

But when the people took a block of wood, which is a good thing, and fashioned it
into a god and put it on a pedestal and worshipped it, was the wood useful or good
for anything?

NO!

It was now completely and totally worthless for anything because it wasn't being
used properly!

In our culture, we don't do this any more—we don't built idols of wood or gold, but
do we have idols in our culture? Oh my, yes.

-money, power, sex, people, success, pleasure, entertainment, approval,
independence, the list goes on and on and on

The great Reformer John Calvin said "Our hearts are idol factories."

You and I creatively and perpetually crank out idols, taking good things and
attempting to make them ultimate things

And whenever we do that, we lose BOTH the one true Ultimate thing—which is the
real God—AND we lose out on the value of the good thing that's only good when it's
used in its proper place

The Bible says that this is sin—to worship anything other than the one true ultimate
Being is wrong. Only he deserves our worship, not anything else, even the good
things.

A very simple definition of sin is "broken relationship." We are born with a broken
relationship with God and that impacts everything else.

So we have this deep core soul hunger to be loved perfectly, but we're born separated from the only source from which that is possible.

So what we do is we create idols—we try to press our life-roots into other good things since we're cut off from God.

We take the good things in our lives and in our world that are intended to bless us and we try to make them ultimate things
our hearts crank out idols by the boatloads

Martin Luther looked at the ten commandments and he said basically here's the first commandment:

“You shall have no other gods before me.

Anytime we break this commandment, we've turned something into an idol—we've got some other god in front of or more important than the one true god

We've taken a good thing and turned it into an ultimate thing, put something else as God ahead of the true God

And every other commandment that God gives throughout the whole Bible is built on and springs from this one:

So God says: don't steal! Why? Because God is the one who provides for you and takes care of you, you don't seek your security in stuff, so you don't need to steal.

When we DO steal, what does that tell us about who our functional God is?

Our functional God is our stuff, is our money—we've made an idol out of finding security in stuff or money and that drives us to steal

So any and every violation of any and every of God's commandments is essentially breaking this first commandment

Why do we gossip about each other?

Because we've made an idol out of other people and we want approval from someone and social standing and power over someone else so we gossip about them

Any time we sin, it's the outworking of the violation of the first commandment
every single sin we commit is because our hearts are idol factories

And what Jonah's saying is that to take a good thing and make it an idol, make it an ultimate thing is not only sin, it's stupid.

“Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs”

Last week I told you that one of my earliest answers as a kid to the question “what do you want to be when you grow up?”

Was to be a wide receiver for the Dallas Cowboys—but then God made me 5’11” and 138 pounds and that wasn’t going to work out so well for me

But do you know what that was a sign of? It was a sign of one of my greatest temptations and biggest idols that I’m tempted to worship

Being a wide receiver for the Dallas Cowboys was a sign of my core idol and love for the applause of people

Anything wrong with people? Anything wrong with cheering or approving or applauding in some sense of the word? Nope.

But is to take those good things and attempt to make them ultimate things, if I were to make that the core of my life, my whole life’s ambition

It’s an idol and it would be death to me.

As human beings, we are gifted craftsmen and craftswomen at producing all sorts of custom-made idols

Our hearts crank out idols of all sorts of different shapes and forms

And so this week, I polled a group of my friends and asked them to share with me some of their battles with their idols to help us with this conversation

Because our idols are custom-jobs, and what’s an idol for me might not help you uncover your idols because we’re different people

So a handful of my wonderful friends who are very fluent in their battle against idols graciously offered me their insights to help all of us this morning take off our blinders and see our idols

-One woman shared with me about her addiction to control—and how the need for control in her life turned her into an un-repentant control freak

She was stressed all the time, she managed and ran her kids and her husband;

When she was clinging to this idol, her husband and her kids weren’t people or relationships

they were projects she needed to manage and control

And if things got slightly out of control or varied from the schedule she would just lose it and/or melt down

Now, the ability to bring order out of chaos and to get things organized—that’s a great thing! We need order, we need that gift in our world, all of us do.

But to make CONTROL the focal point of your life, to make that an ultimate thing, that's an utter disaster and it destroys relationships rather than serves relationships like it's intended.

-Another friend of mine shared how deeply he needs to be respected and when this idol get violated, he gets instantly irate.

He is incredibly easily offended and takes almost everything personally

For example, when someone cuts him off on the road, he takes it EXTREMELY personally;

if someone does something or says something that could be in the least bit interpreted as a jab or undermining him in anyway

he has this deep self-righteous indignation—it results in either anger or a sullen angry withdrawal

Now, the need to have a sense of worth and value and being respected is a good thing—the Scriptures declare we're made in God's image! That's about as valuable as anything gets here on the earth!

But when we take a good thing like needing to be respected and valued we make that hunger our ultimate purpose

and then of course we project that need onto the people around us and make them serve our idol

It enslaves us and severely handicaps our ability to be in real, God-honoring relationships

-Another friend of mine shared about his struggles with alcohol.

Alcohol became his god.

And it almost wrecked and ruined his marriage, his relationship with his kids, and his relationship with God was completely non-existent,

because like most addicts he refused to admit the problem and refused to give up his idol

Alcohol in the Bible, not all bad—might come as a shock to some of you! Scripture actually celebrates alcohol and talks about it very often in positive terms

But to take a good gift like alcohol, and turn it into an ultimate thing, to let it over-run your life, heart, marriage, family, everything—that's an idol, that's death to you

Another friend of mine a guy this time talked about control:

-My most generic and primary idol is the desire to be in control..

A specific way this plays out is in how I use time. I've always had a great deal of control over what I did or how I spent my days and I love that. I'm pretty sure that the flexibility I enjoy is a huge idol for me. The idea of working for someone else scares me to death. It's also my primary concern about having children.

A picture of this playing out (with a side of introversion) is how often I get frustrated when surrounded by others for a significant amount of time. I find myself drifting off to be alone with little concern about how my absence might affect others. I see this particularly with family situations.

-One over-achiever wrote this, she says:

My idols are these:

1. my self-image (particularly as competent/successful/amazing)
2. over-busyness (in order to try to prove my self-worth to me and everyone else)
3. tired, un-centered, not connected to God or to my family
4. admitting I can't (and shouldn't) do it all. confessing to God & family my neglect of them. saying "no" to activities/causes in order to create time to be still and silent

...it's occurring to me more than ever that I have to fully embrace how LOVED I AM BY GOD just as ME (not what I do or how I appear)... and how I have to SIT STILL in that over and over and over or my eyes will keep looking back at my image of me, driving the compulsion to DO, SPIN, ACHIEVE.

-One guy wrote:

My idol is the idol of self-defined perfectionism. (i.e. "making" the world into *my* image)

When I'm clinging to that idol I assign right/wrong values to things that can't be categorized as such (i.e. my wife's way of folding the laundry is wrong, mine is right).

I avoid risks because I'm scared of failing or looking foolish.

I don't start projects, conversations, conflict that I want to because I'm afraid it won't be "perfect".

When I'm clinging to that idol I experience constant fatigue. My mind is constantly running everything through my self-constricted grid of what's perfect and what's not.

And I experience isolation. I avoid people because they're too "messy". Even when I'm physically with others or in public I can feel isolated because I'm so inside my own head with critiques and making judgment calls.

-One guy called me and we had a great conversation and he said,

“You know, my biggest idol is simply to avoid pain—whatever ways I can avoid pain, I’m always tempted to do that.

Whether that’s retreating into entertainment and media, or the temptation to act out sexually and look at porn, or even avoid real relating because it’s just too hard.

My biggest idol is comfort and pleasure and the avoidance of anything that feels costly whether that’s emotionally, physically or relationally.”

-One woman wisely summed up her idol this way:

To tell you the truth, I think my #1 idol has always been myself. I bow to me. I obey me. I spend most of my time on me--thinking, feeling, caring for, me.

My friends, this is the story of your life and my life—we have longings to be loved eternally but our hearts are idol factories, and we generate all these things that can’t really bless us

And Jonah here tells us what’s true: those who put their hope in vain idols, things that are good but are not made to be ultimate things

If we put our hope and trust and regard and roots into those things, we forfeit our hope of everlasting, perfect, steadfast love.

Because an idol cannot give perfect love, it can only demand perfect love;

REPEAT THAT: AN IDOL, ANY GOOD THING THAT YOU TAKE AND TURN INTO AN ULTIMATE THING, CANNOT GIVE YOU PERFECT LOVE, IT CAN ONLY DEMAND PERFECT LOVE FROM YOU

It can only take and take and take whatever you want to feed it, however much you want to feed into it.

If you insist on pouring your energies and life into good but not Ultimate things
you forfeit the steadfast and perfect love and grace that could be yours, that you were designed for
because you’re TRYING to drawing to draw life out of something that cannot in the end give you life.

Can you start to see some of your idols? Where do you attempt to find life apart from God?

And let me ask you, how’s that working for you?

And let me invite you, implore you, plead with you—you can’t find perfect love there. In fact, you’re forfeiting your access to infinite love.

The invitation this morning: to cast down your idols.

Jonah, here in Jonah 2, has been delivered from himself and his self-destructive tendency towards willfulness

He finally prays in the belly of the fish

And what he proclaims to us this morning is the true word that if we cling to worthless idols, we forfeit the infinite love, the infinite grace that could be ours.

There's an exchange happening here—we can either have our idols or we can have God and his infinite love

We cannot have both, you will cling to one and forfeit the other

This morning, as we move toward communion, we're going to have a chance to make that choice.

Underneath your seat is a shredded up piece of paper and you've got a pen there as well.

Right now, I want you to get that out, and on that paper, just between you and the Lord

I want to invite you to write your idol on that little shredded up piece of paper

Whatever it is that the Lord might be bringing to mind this morning, I want you to write that down on this little piece of scrap paper

No one's looking over at you, we're not embarrassing anyone here, this is just a moment for you to be honest between you and the Lord

writing down the idol that you know you're tempted to worship, be as specific as possible

Okay, now I want you to squeeze that little piece of paper as tightly as you can—cling onto it with all that you've got.

Now look back down at that piece of paper—you know what that idol is worth? About as much as that little wrinkled up scrap piece of paper.

We've taken a good thing, and tried to make it an ultimate thing.

That good thing in its proper place, back into its right spot, would be VERY valuable a tremendous blessing to you, it most likely is a gift that God wants you to enjoy and put to its right and proper use!

but by clinging to it and making it an idol, we've just destroyed it

We've lost the value of that good thing in its place AND we've forfeited steadfast, perfect, eternal love.

Our idols are as worthless as scrap paper. This is reality, this is how worthless our idols are

Up here and in the back are stations for communion.

Because we are idol-worshipping people, because our hearts are idol-factories, God had a couple of choices:

1. he could blow us up and start all over again, 2. he could let us continue but walk away from what he created, or 3. he could buy back us idol-worshippers.

And God chooses door #3: he wants to buy us back from our worthless idols, but the only way that he can do that is by sacrificing his own son.

God is a holy God, and he cannot be in the presence of un-holy people who worship worthless pieces of paper

So the only way we become holy is by the forgiveness and washing away of our sins

Throughout the Old Testament, God establishes the sacrificial system, where the blood of bulls and goats cleanses the worshipper so that they can approach God.

But all of that was preparation for the time when the Perfect Sacrifice would come. He would come and lay down his life to redeem your life and my life, to save us from our self-destructive idol worshipping

So that we might experience, know, and live in perfect grace, unrelenting joy and love.

The most incredulous and incredible thing about Christianity is not the idea of God or the miracles or even the death and resurrection of Jesus

The thing that most of us just can't believe and can't get our minds around and live into is that we are wonderfully and relentlessly loved by an infinitely good and beautiful God

On the night Jesus was going to his death for you and for me and for our useless idols, he sat around a table with 12 guys whose hearts were idol factories, just like ours

And he took some bread and he offered it to those guys and he said "This is my body, broken for you, eat this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, and he offered it to those same guys hung up on those same

idols and he said, "This is my blood poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Drink this in remembrance of me."

The idols that we crank out and worship and live for have broken our relationship with God

But he has demonstrated his love for us and given us access back into his eternal and unending love by his death on the cross for our sins.

And this morning, you've got a choice to make as we move into a time of communion

You can either stay in your chair and cling to, hold onto your little worthless piece of paper, your worthless idol

Or you can come here to this table, lay your idol down, release it before the Lord, and with hands now empty and available, take the body and blood of Jesus

You can either cling to your idol and forfeit the grace that could be yours or you can forfeit your idol and cling to God's infinite grace

That's the invitation on the table this morning.

Some of you have got this idol and you WANT to get rid of it, but you know that you need some help—it's so woven into you and your life, you need someone else to help you to un-weave it.

So we've got prayer ministers around the back to pray with you, to help you pry this little worthless piece of paper off your hand so that you've got hands free to be filled up with Jesus.

We're going to move into a time of singing during this communion time, as you come, bring your idol with you, lay it on the table, take the elements and go ahead and eat and drink them

Pray.