



THE WIN

The win this week is for your group to identify the impact of pluralism in our own lives and to take steps towards applying the gospel to that area.

3-5
minutes

SERMON RECAP: WHAT DID THE TEXT MEAN? WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

In the message this week, we learned that pluralism is the acceptance of various and different views rather than a single view or opinion. However, all religions cannot be true. While all religions have exclusive claims, Christianity is the only worldview to believe that the Son of God, who was divine himself, lived as a man, died on a cross, and was resurrected from the dead. All of Christianity hinges on the Resurrection.

Christianity affirms that:

- God (Yahweh) insists that He is the only God
- This God demands payment for sin
- This God requires a response to the death and resurrection of Jesus

What questions or topics from the sermon would you like to discuss with the group?

3-5
minutes

WARM UP

Discuss your experiences talking with friends or acquaintances of other religions or worldviews. What are some common objections to Christianity? How have you addressed those objections in your discussions?

30-35
minutes

THE TEXT: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME?

Since we have seen that Jesus is the only answer to pluralism, we must learn how to live as his followers in an increasingly pluralistic society.

One of the main themes that we see throughout the Bible is *idolatry*. Idolatry is at the heart of pluralism. The entire story of the Bible can be seen as a struggle between genuine faith and idolatry.

One book where this is clearly seen is in the book of Judges. In this book, the people of Israel repeatedly stumble into idolatry as they settle into Canaan, the land that God has promised them. This doesn't mean that the

Israelites completed stopped worshipping Yahweh, the one true God. What most Israelites did was to *merge* their worship of Yahweh with idols.

READ THIS quote and other excerpts from Timothy Keller's "*Living in a Pluralistic Society*."¹

"The pagan worldview was that there were many gods (e.g. of agriculture, business, love, music, and war), each of whom had a proscribed area of influence, and none of whom demanded lordship over every single area of life. In this view, everyone had his or her own god(s), chosen or discarded on the basis of one's interests and needs. It was a "mix and match" religion in which the worshiper was sovereign, negotiating what was necessary. Paganism therefore could accept the existence (but not the exclusive sovereignty) of the Lord, who demanded that his worshipers give him absolute lordship over every square inch of life."

This is the greatest danger, then, for believers in a pagan world. It is not so much that the believer becomes an atheist, but that idols are combined with God in the heart. If a believer lives in a city where commerce is not just a practice but a functional god—providing people with identity and security—the danger is that the Christian maintains his or her doctrinal beliefs and ethical practices but divides heart worship between the Lord and money or career."

As a group, read Judges 2:1-3

ASK THESE:

What was the foundational truth that God reminded the Israelites of v.1?

In light of this, in v. 2, what are the Israelites told to avoid and what are they told to do instead?

How could the idols or "gods" of the Canaanites could become thorns or traps for the Israelites?

As a group, read Judges 2:6-19.

In this passage, we see a cycle emerge with four stages that the Israelites constantly repeated throughout history.

DO THIS: Divide the group into 4 and assign each group one of the sections of Scripture. Have each group describe the stage they are assigned. Leader tip: Use the commentary from each section to make sure groups gain a full understanding of each stage.

Stage 1: Rebellion v. 10-13

Keller: "We see in verses 10-13 that there is a rebellion. This rebellion had two sub-stages. First, they forgot. Verse 10 says that they "knew neither the LORD nor what he had done." The word "know" probably does not mean that they did not "know about" the exodus and the Red Sea, but rather that the saving acts of God were no longer precious or central to them. They had not learned to revere and rejoice in what God had done. In other words, they had forgotten the "gospel" that they were saved from slavery in Egypt by the gracious, mighty acts of God. Second, as a result of forgetting the gospel, they turned to idols. They "served the Baals." The word "Baal" is a Canaanite word for "Lord." They served the mini-lords. "Ashtoreths" were female fertility gods."

Stage 2: Oppression v. 14-15

Keller: "We see in verses 14-15 that, as a result, there was oppression. Various people groups rose up or invaded and either plundered or enslaved the Israelites. Israel no longer had the strength to resist."

¹ Timothy Keller. *Living in a Pluralistic Society*. New York (Redeemer Presbyterian Church), 2009, 15-17.

Stage 3: Repentance v. 18

Keller: "We see in verse 18 that God would send rescue when "they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them." This was the instrument God used to relieve and save them. As we will see later (e.g. 3:8-9), this "groaning" usually took the form of prayer, repentance, and the smashing of their idols."

Stage 4: New leadership v. 16-19

Keller: "We see in verses 16-19 that God sent his salvation through "judges"— anointed leaders who liberated the people from their slave-masters. However, the advice of the judges was not heeded in any lasting way (v. 17). Always after (or sometimes before) the death of the judge, the people slipped back into their paganism (v. 19). This means, of course, that we need something better than a human judge, better than a human savior. Human saviors can deliver the body, but not the soul. There is every indication that this "cycle" is not only a cycle but a downward spiral. As Judges progresses, we will see that the judges themselves, as well as the "revivals" they lead, become weaker and more flawed every time."

READ THIS:

It's not just Israel who repeats this mind-numbing cycle. We do too. Sure, we may not worship statues but there are many things that we give ourselves to searching desperately for meaning and value. Just as the Israelites "prostituted themselves to other gods" (v. 17), we also "cheat" on the one true God and give our hearts to things that are worthless in comparison.

ASK THESE:

How can we identify potential idols in our own life?

Take turns as a group choosing one of these two questions to answer:

1. Life only has meaning if I have _____?
2. I only have worth if I have _____?

How can we determine whether God is truly Lord over this area of my life?

Take turns as a group answering these questions:

1. Am I willing to do whatever God *says* about this area?
2. Am I willing to accept whatever God *sends* in this area?

As we see, just as the Israelites are broken people, we are too. They desperately needed a Savior to come who could rescue them from this endless cycle of idolatry. And we do too. How can we have any hope?

Have someone read 1 Thess 1:9-10

ASK THIS: What is our new purpose? What does Jesus rescue us from as a result of His resurrection?

3-5
minutes

CLOSING THOUGHT

Ultimately our only hope for change is to submit these "idols" to Christ, acknowledging His Lordship over *every* area of our life. We must believe that Jesus is better! It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can truly serve God, so we must admit our dependence on Him and ask for His power to help us.

STUDY NOTES

For a deeper study on living in an age of pluralism, you can purchase the full version of Tim Keller's "Living in a Pluralistic Society" at www.gospelinlife.com.