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John's Final Word

1 John 5:21

Prayer: *Father, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for the blessings that we still are able to enjoy and among those blessings, Lord, are your word that you've given to us that we can open up. Along with your word, Lord, is your Holy Spirit who accompanies us on this journey. And so we pray your spirit would open our hearts, our minds, our eyes, and our ears and give us the ability to hear what you are saying, not what I'm saying but what you are saying, Father, and that it would be of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well after 24 messages we finally arrived at the end of 1 John. And you'll find out John ends his epistle with one final command in verse 21, it's the very last thing he says in his first letter. He says: *Little children, keep yourselves from idols.* It seems like a simple enough request, I mean, forbidding idol worship was in fact the very first commandment that God gave to the nation of Israel when he delivered the ten commandments. *Exodus 20*, he says: *And God spoke all these words, saying: "I am the LORD your God,*

who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. "You shall have no other gods before Me."

God was speaking to a nation that was surrounded by idol worshipers. There was Baal, there was Ashteroth, there was Chemosh, there was Molech, each of them vile and evil, each of them capable of demanding abominable worship. That's not all that God was speaking about. His commandment demanded far more than simply avoiding ghoulish knock-offs of the real God. I seriously doubt that any of us in this room are in any way tempted to worship Baal or Molech or Chemosh or Ashteroth but that doesn't mean that we are not sorely tempted to idol worship. So just what is an idol? Well by definition an idol is anything that stands between you and God. And what God was saying in that very first commandment was literally you shall have no other gods before my face, meaning that God must occupy the highest order of importance in your life. Anything that takes precedence over God therefore becomes an idol.

Now, almost 13 years ago I did a study on idols and idol worshiping. We were actually finishing up the book of Jonah only to discover that one of Jonah's greatest problems was not only that he directly disobeyed God but that he was in fact a great idol worshiper. I think everybody knows the story, I mean, Jonah is told by God to go to Nineveh and to preach to them that their

destruction is imminent. Jonah says the equivalent of "sure thing, God" then he hops a boat going in the exact opposite direction and the rest is history. There's a huge storm, Jonah is tossed overboard, he's swallowed by a fish and then spat out on dry land. He then goes on to warn the Ninevites up there of their impending doom and the entire nation -- much to the dismay of Jonah -- repents.

Well, the back story is that the Ninevites were deadly enemies of Israel, I mean, they had this outstanding reputation, they were essentially the ISIS of their day. I mean they were known for terrifying and brutal treatment of any and all who they defeated in war and worse yet, they were the sworn enemies of Israel. Jonah was a prophet in Israel who heard God's command to warn these Ninevites and he simply couldn't abide the idea of aiding and abetting a people that he considered to be brutally murderous enemies of his own nation. The whole story of Jonah is one of God's mercy delivered to people who don't deserve it by someone who doesn't want to deliver it.

So Jonah finds himself in the belly of a fish having three whole days to think about his situation. This is what he says in *Jonah 2:7*. He says: *"When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. "Those who*

cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them. But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the LORD.'" And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Well it's verse 8 that describes the core issue that Jonah faced. He says, *"Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them."* And there he identifies his problem: Jonah was an idol worshiper. His love for his race, his nation, and his faith had become an idol, and God was dealing with Jonah, the idol worshiper, with a severe mercy designed to strip that title away. See, the greatest problem that Jonah had was an inability to see the idol worship that had overcome him, and that's our problem as well. See, the problem with idols is their apparent transparency. We just don't see them. Idols are everywhere. We pay homage to them and oftentimes we worship them even though they suck the spiritual life right out of our souls.

Back in 2009 I heard a lecture about idols. It was given to pastors by Tim Keller, and he made some amazing observations about idols today. He basically said nothing has changed since the days when Paul walked through the Areopagus pointing out that idols have no power. He pointed out that back then they had what they called

the Agora, that was the ancient cultural marketplace where thoughts and ideas were disseminated, actually where idols were worshiped. And he makes the case that we have the exact same thing today. He says our Agora is no different, it's just got a different name. Ours is called "Hollywood" or "Harvard" or "The New York Times." He said, we no longer bow down our bodies there, we just instead bow down our souls. Keller said, we sophisticated 21st century people laugh at the idea that idols could control whole areas like they used to in ancient Greece and Rome, but that's exactly what they do right here, right now in the United States. You know, the ancients had Aphrodite, that was the goddess of beauty who ruled one whole area; they had Athena who was the goddess of reason who ruled another; they had Artemis, the goddess of success and prosperity who ruled yet another. And every area was dominated by a particular idol, but again, we're no different today.

Keller pointed out that Boston with Harvard, MIT and all its great medical facilities is an area that's dominated by Athena, the goddess of reason. It's the place where intellectual brilliance is the dominating idol. You have New York on the other hand with its financial centers and Wall Street, it's dominated by Artemis, the goddess of success. LA and Hollywood are still dominated by the goddess Aphrodite because what still matters there is physical appearance. I mean it's been 2,000 years since Paul identified

idol worship as the controlling influence in a culture and it's absolutely no different today.

And in his lecture about those idols, Tim Keller made a very bold statement. He said: "If your congregation doesn't come to grips with the idols that they are worshiping, you as a pastor will never be able to get through to them." He said, "You'll just be adding layer upon layer of spiritual information without really affecting people's lives." And I thought about that scripture that describes the danger of coming to the gospel for information rather than transformation. *2 Timothy 3:7* describes the situation and describes the mindset as -- quote -- *"always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth."*

Well, the truth about our own individual idols, it's not the kind of truth that you're saving up for Bible jeopardy. This is not something that's just good to know, it's actually critical to know. It's vital to know. It's kind of like biblical CPR or biblical self-defense. These are vital truths that we have to learn if we ever hope to make any progress with our spiritual lives because Jonah's words are absolute truth. *"Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them."* Just as Jonah was absolutely clueless about the nature and the identity and the power of the idol that he worshiped, so we too also need to ask God to

show us first of all what an idol is; second, how an idol operates; and thirdly, how we can defeat them.

So first let me just define what an idol is. I point out the lecture I heard has become a book by Tim Keller, it is entitled: *"Counterfeit Gods"* subtitled *"The Empty Promises of Money, Sex and Power and The Only Hope That Matters."* Just like Jonah found himself engulfed and entwined in seawater and seaweed, so we too get engulfed and entwined in our own individual idols and Dr. Keller does a great job of discerning just what an idol is. He says -- quote -- "When you look to some created thing to give you only what God can give you, that is idolatry." He says, "Idolatry is anything in your life that is so central to your life that you can't have a life without it. If I have that, I have value. If I lose that, I have no life."

And we think of idols as besetting sins or habits that kind of bleed away our loyalty to Christ, but that's only half right. More often than not it's not the apparently bad things that strip away our hearts, because those things are way, way too obvious. I mean how many of us are tempted to bow down to a molded golden calf? Nobody. For Christians, idols are far, far more subtle. See, our idols are good and noble things that are pushed to ignoble ends and that's what spiritually cripples us.

Keller's list of potential idols includes: Family, children, career, money, achievement, acclaim, social standing, romantic relationships, competence, skill, beauty, political and social causes, religious activity, even Bible translations. I mean all these good things can become idols for us. You see, Jonah took this good thing, his love for the people of Israel and his life as a prophet in Israel and he made it into an ultimate thing which morphed into an idol. And Jonah had made his identification with Israel into that idol. He knew that Nineveh was a grave geopolitical threat to Israel, so when God chose him to bring repentance to Nineveh, he just flat out disobeyed. And when he ultimately preached repentance to Nineveh and the entire city repented, Jonah was furious. I mean, the last thing that he wanted was to see a vicious enemy of Israel spared in spite of the fact that that was clearly God's doing.

See, Jonah's national identity as a Jew had become so central to his life that he just couldn't cope with the idea that God would spare them. And idolatry by definition is anything in your life that's so central to your life that you can't have a life without it. Jonah saw himself losing his life when he realized that not only was this nation being spared, but he was the one responsible.

At the end of the book of Jonah, Nineveh repents, Jonah is enraged,

and this is what he says to God in *Jonah 4*. He says: *But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."*

Jonah was an idol worshiper. His idol was his role as Israel's national prophet. Take that away by making Jonah his enemy's savior, Jonah no longer wants to live. And the one that he's really furious with, it's not Nineveh, it's God. And so it is with us. Take away those things that we hold dear, our health, our wealth, our families, our careers, we'll behave just like Jonah does, we'd just as soon die. Unfortunately that's the mark of an idol worshiper. Jonah had allowed a good thing to become an ultimate thing and that's precisely how we create our own idols.

As I said, part of the problem of identifying the idols in our life as I mentioned before is that they're almost always good things pushed until they're out of bounds. And what often pushes them out of bounds is the fact that idols can never satisfy. They constantly overpromise and under deliver. But you see instead of

seeing that and grasping it and understanding it, we just double down on our efforts. We're trying to get blood out of a turnip. There's only one who can deliver hope, joy and satisfaction that we were designed for because he's the one who designed us in the first place.

Jesus Christ laid down his life for us on the cross not just to rescue us from hell but also to redeem our lives right here, right now on earth. He constantly preached that we were to repent for the kingdom of heaven was what? At hand. The kingdom isn't just heaven and eternal life doesn't start when we die, it's all right here and right now. This life is merely training us for the real one that starts when we breathe our last. And while we're here we have an enemy who will constantly substitute fool's gold for the real thing. And more often than not we just -- we fall for it. The problem with so many is that we are successful with obvious idols such as money, fame and power, and the problem is that the people who get that, only the people who get those things, only they really know how little they deliver, but they're not talking. I mean for most of the world, those things are the carrot at the end of the stick. And those who have actually grabbed that carrot, grabbed ahold of it and gotten to eat it, they've all understood that it's been a waste.

I've only heard two people come out and say how little those things delivered in terms of actual satisfaction; one of them was the late Rush Limbaugh and the other was Steve Martin. And they were both wildly successful multimillionaire entertainers. I heard both of them say if you only knew how little satisfaction that family and money and power delivers, they both said, you'd be astounded. I mean, that kind of candor is rare. And you see, most of the people who made it to the top, they don't want you to know how empty the top is because they don't know where else to go.

See, everything that this world has to offer us is like cotton candy. And from the outside it appears to have substance, it looks like it could be indeed very satisfying but those looks are always deceiving. They're deceiving because we weren't designed to be satisfied with what this world is offering us. And so we see that cotton candy, we take a big bite of it and it just kind of melts away, there's no substance, there's really nothing there, only the appearance of something solid. So we take a bigger bite and it too melts away.

I think we've all experienced in one way or another how empty worldly satisfaction is, how it always overpromises and under delivers. I'll give you one recent tiny example of my own experience. I'm old enough to clearly remember when television

consisted of a 25-inch box that was about a foot and a half deep because it had a tube in it. And I remember the first widescreen TV I ever got. I got a deal on a huge projection TV. I thought it was the greatest thing since the ballpoint pen. I mean, it was amazing. I could actually watch football games and people were like five to ten times the size they were in a regular television. They were a bit fuzzy and they were a little out of focus, but if that was so I didn't notice it all too well until a new innovation came out which was called "HDTV."

I discovered something very quickly. I mean I'd never seen high definition TV and at first it was absolutely enthralling, and I watched a few nature shows, I watched the *Discovery* Channel, football on it was amazing. But here's what I noticed about HDTV. After a few weeks in my living room it was no longer fantastic, it was my new normal. It was now what I expected. But something else happened as well. Now regular non-HDTV was annoying. I mean, I'd look and I'd say, wait a minute, that's 480, that's 720, that's not even 1080. This is not what I like, it's too blurry, it's too unfocused, it's too lacking in detail compared to the HDTV. It was a bummer. And what was perfectly acceptable only a few weeks previously was now kind of annoying. And to me the spiritual implications were obvious. The more things we get, the more the capacity to be thrilled by those things diminishes. And you would

think as Christians we would say of course they can't satisfy because God makes it clear that only he can ultimately satisfy, but that claim is so easy to forget in the clamor of a society that takes idol worship for granted, in a society that depends on an ever-increasing appetite for dissatisfaction to keep its economy going.

I mean our culture has told us repeatedly, it isn't God the pleasures of his kingdom you crave, it's a bigger and brighter and better TV. If you have a 40-inch and its shortcomings start to annoy you, you need a 42, then a 47, then a 52, then a 65, then a 72, all of it in stunning HDTV. And all of a sudden, guess what? Technology produces UHD, ultrahigh definition. Now the new standard is 3840 instead of 1080. And what that means now is that as spectacular as that TV looks, it's just going to make every other TV look annoying and soon it, too, will be accepted as the norm. It's just the newest electronic vision of cotton candy. And we all know there's always going to be something newer, bigger and better to fill a hole that can never be satisfied. And that's just it, it can never be satisfied while we're here on earth. And God knows this perfectly well, and this is what he says. He says: *Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.* What God is saying is that he

is what our deepest desire should be. He says: *Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.*

You see my HDTV experience, it can be repeated with every single thing this world has to offer us because nothing in this world is capable of satisfying our real desires. It was C. S. Lewis who said: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." And that world is the kingdom of God. That's where the real gold lies, and we spend an enormous amount of energy mining for fool's gold.

You know, part of the experience of watching those old horror movies is that you get this God-like experience of watching the characters make bad choices that bring them closer and closer to disasters. You see the monsters that they're heading towards, and they don't see them. I can't help but wonder if that's exactly what the saints in heaven see when they look at us. I mean, they see the choices that we make day in and day out to forego the kingdom of God and the richest of fare for the cheap imitation of cotton candy that this world offers. I think they have to see this as kind of a horror show where the characters make the same bad choices over and over and over again. The choice to looking to

material things for satisfaction is obvious but it doesn't make it any less prevalent.

But what about, what about other forms of idol worship? What about those ones that are a lot less obvious? What about making my children into the living embodiment of my success or failure? What about making my career more important than God? You know, Keller pointed out that the ancient gods required sacrifice, and that's still happening today. If you want to be successful in New York City where the goddess of success prevails, be prepared to sacrifice your family. You see, you probably can't reach the top in the world of finance and still be the husband and father that God wants you to be. I know folks who have made it to the top and it's cost them their families. I mean just ask Tom Brady how he thought he could serve Artemis and Aphrodite and still keep his family. Not so. And we're shocked at how those things blow up but God sees them right from the start, and just like you saw in Jonah and like with Jonah, God will do whatever it takes to break that idol's hold on us.

What about my reputation? What if my reputation is the only thing that matters to me? Would God ever allow a believer's reputation to be ruined? I mean, wouldn't that hurt the gospel? I mean, that couldn't happen to me because God just wouldn't let it happen.

What if your reputation has become an idol? I mean, would God ever do anything as drastic as to take that away? Well, if God is willing to sacrifice your reputation in order to purge you of a false god, would that be okay?

Let's consider Joseph. Consider what happened to his reputation. I mean what if your name was Joseph and you found yourself, like him, completely innocent, totally innocent, with your reputation in tatters sitting in a jail cell accused of raping Potiphar's wife. Could it be that Joseph's reputation had become an idol? Joseph's charges were never dropped, they just a meted them in pharaoh's court. Perhaps your name is Jonah and God has just asked you to shatter your reputation as a prophet by giving aid and comfort with an offer of repentance to the enemy at Nineveh, and so you just flat out refuse. Could God take drastic steps to address that? Well, Jonah had made a good thing of his prophetic gift into an ultimate thing; it became an idol to him and God used a great fish to drive it out of him.

I mean, you think of God being a little severe, remember the first commandment that he ever gave: *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me."* You see it doesn't matter what form the idol takes, God loves you enough to risk your anger, your

bitterness and your hostility while he takes it away. I mean if you're one of his and your idols are getting the best of you, you're going to find yourself right back at the two scriptures that God uses to define how he works in the lives of his children. We're right back at *Romans 8:28* and *Numbers 32*. *God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him, who are called according to his purpose.* And we can be sure our sin is going to find us out. If there are idols in our lives, God is at work even now rooting them out; and sometimes that is a very painful process.

So how do I know? How do I know if the good things in my life have become ultimate things that I now worship as idols? Well, Tim Keller points out three things, three major signs in his book *Counterfeit Gods* that are very helpful. This is what he says first. He says: "One way requires that we look at our imagination. Archbishop William Temple once said, 'your religion is what you do with your solitude.' In other words, the true God of your heart is what your thoughts effortlessly go to when there is nothing else demanding your attention." What do you enjoy daydreaming about? What occupies your mind when you have nothing else to think about? Look first at your thoughts.

Second, he says: "Another way to discern your heart's true love is

to look at how you spend your money. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there is your heart also. Your money flows almost effortlessly toward your heart's greatest love. In fact, the mark of an idol is that you spend too much money on it, and you must try to exercise self-control constantly. Our patterns of spending reveal our idols." Secondly, look at your spending habits. And lastly, he says: "You may regularly go to a place of worship. You may have a full, devout set of doctrinal beliefs. You may be trying very hard to believe and obey God. However, what is your real daily functional salvation? What are you really living for, what is your real -- not your professed -- God? A good way to discern this is how you respond to unanswered prayers and frustrated hopes. If you ask for something that you don't get, you may become sad and disappointed. Then you go on. Hey, life's not over. Those are not your functional masters. But when you pray and work for something and you don't get it and you respond with explosive anger or deep despair, then you may have found your real God. Like Jonah, you become angry enough to die. Look for your idols at the bottom of your most painful emotions, especially those that never seemed to lift and that drive you to do things that you know are wrong."

Thirdly, look at your emotions. That's excellent but painful advice. I've said at the beginning of this message, we need to ask

God to show us first what an idol is. And we found out the surprise here is more often than not for us Christians idols are good things pushed to ultimate ends.

Secondly, we asked how does an idol operate? It operates by taking over the functional control of the place that only God should occupy in our lives. And we identify them by looking at our thought patterns, our spending patterns and our emotional reactions to unanswered prayer.

And thirdly we ask, how do we defeat them? Well again, Keller suggests what Paul tells us in *Colossians 3:1-5*. It's all a matter of what appetites you feed. *Colossians 3* says: *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*

Seek those things which are above. Set your mind on things above, not on things of the earth. Paul was talking here about feeding

appetites. I mean, our lives are just a series of appetites that grow and change as we grow and change. And they grow as we feed them. You know, when I was seven I wanted to be a cowboy. When I was eleven that appetite had changed from cowboy to an athlete. By the time I got to college my appetite was to be a writer, then a scientist and then I met Janice and my only appetite was to be a husband. In May of '73 I met Jesus or should I say Jesus met me and from that day forward he created a new appetite in me. And God describes that in *Ezekiel 36*. He says: *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.* And so from that day forward I had this brand new heart. I was no longer a slave to my old pattern of living, and now the growth of my new God-given appetite was up to me. Remember Jonah's words from the belly of the fish. He says: *"Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them."* He's describing a choice we make to embrace the grace God gives us to grow as believers or to remain milk fed babies by turning away from the love that he has for us.

Romans 6:17 says the same thing in other words. He says: *But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has*

now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. What it's saying there, it's now my choice, it's my choice as to what I'm going to be a slave to: The cotton candy or the kingdom. Romans 6:16 says: Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey-whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

You see, I in Christ now for the very first time had the freedom to choose, to choose the appetite of obedience. I had lots of other good appetites, I mean, I had a appetite to be a husband, a father, to own my own business. Each one flowed from the previous one, but they all kind of ran on a parallel track with my new appetite, this new appetite for the kingdom of God. But you know, sometimes some of these good appetites compete with the best appetite, and the urgency of those good appetites makes them seem at times that they are the best of appetites, but they're not.

I've said it many, many times, the devil has a playbook for every one of us and it's unique to every one of us. The one thing we know is the playbook for Christians in terms of idols is not going to be sex, drugs and rock 'n roll, it's going to be something far more dangerous because it's not going to be bad things, it's going

to be good things, like family, career, ministry, all pushed to ultimate things. That's one thing to be coming down with obvious sins, it's another thing quite different to understand the danger in doing things for all the wrong reasons.

Jesus was murdered by the good people of his day because he called a spade a spade and an idol an idol. And so if I want to conquer my own idols, I first have to conquer my own appetite so that Christ and his kingdom are number one. Jesus said: *"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."* And so the appetite that will set in order all my other appetites is the one that Paul proclaimed in *Philippians 3*. He says: *But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.* Paul says every good, every outstanding thing in my life I count as rubbish. He actually said it worse, he said, "dung," compared to gaining Christ. That's the appetite that we want to have.

Say, well, how did Paul manage to get there? How did he develop this all-consuming appetite for Christ? What I've learned in the 49 years since I've received my new appetite from Christ is that

the appetite for Christ and his kingdom works just like any other appetite, you grow it by feeding it. *James says: Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Psalm 34 says: Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!* Jesus said in *John 15: "Abide in me and you will bear much fruit."*

Loosely translated, Jesus is saying, the more you hang around me, the more I will rub off on you. The more I rub off on you, the more hunger for me and my kingdom will grow. You grow an appetite by feeding it. The more you know Jesus, the more you will love him; the more you love him, the more you serve him; the more you serve him, the more you realize that this is cotton candy that the world is offering, and it's only the real thing that will satisfy like nothing else can.

The more you *taste and see that the Lord is good*, the more you appreciate God's amazement at our appetite for cotton candy. I mean, how many of us can look in the mirror and honestly say my greatest passion, my deepest appetite is Christ and his kingdom. That's not God's plan for the exceptional and rare saint among us, that's God's will for every single one of his own. And if you can't look in the mirror and say Christ is my deepest appetite, then something is drastically wrong with the way you are living your Christian life, and you're only cheating yourself. Understand, God's love is not based on how well you pass the

appetite test. *While we were sinners, Christ died for us.* His offer to his children has always been filet mignon and sometimes, truth be told, we prefer dog food or worse yet, cotton candy. And God sounds absolutely perplexed. He says: *Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.*

The good news is the simple fact that you grow an appetite just by feeding it. And the appetite for Christ and his kingdom you feed by scripture, by prayer, by fellowship. Every single day I pray for Janice and me that our greatest joy and deepest pleasure would be to see Christ high and lifted up. I pray God to feed that appetite. And God has given us the means to feed it. You see, you feed the appetite by making the body of Christ the place where you feed it. And you do that through Bible study, through small groups, through prayer, through worship, through bearing one another's burdens. That's the reason why the church is here.

The reason why the local body exists is to proclaim over and over again not what is good, but what is best, and that's Jesus Christ and him crucified. The way each of us conquer our idols that we all tend to worship is for each of us to grow our own appetites because when you fully embrace what is ultimately good and what is

alone ultimately satisfying, then even multiple good things that we care about, like family or career and security, they all assume their rightful place. And then we can say with Jonah, *"Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them."* And when and only when we realize that, our appetites for the kingdom will never grow unless we feed them and that the church really is God's feeding place.

I mean John knew well, he knew well the risks that his beloved children faced as he concluded his letter. And number one among those risks was when he warned them when he wrote in that last verse, *"Little children keep yourself from idols."* Ask God this morning to show you what, if anything, has become an idol in your life. Ask him for the grace first to identify it and then to forsake it. Ask for the grace to be like Paul when he said: *I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord.* Let's pray.

Father, I confess that I am an idol worshiper. I believe everyone of us in this room can make that confession as well. It was Calvin who said that we are idol factories. We manufacture them constantly. And Lord, we want to be able and aware to see what they are because they operate way out of our senses. They love to be invisible, they love to be unseen, they love to operate that

way. And so I pray that you would give us the ability to see what our mindset is when we're daydreaming, what our checkbook says about what's important, and what those things that we feel denied that cause us to absolutely feel like life is not worth living, that those things might point us to those areas in our life where you are telling us, folks, those are idols in your life. I pray you would give us the grace, the insight, and the wisdom to forsake them for the only one that matters and that's you and the kingdom. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.