

Pastor Carlos Lollett
Idols of Our Day

October 22, 2023

Series: One

Acts 19:23-34

Two Cities Church! My name is Carlos, and I'm your friend. What a privilege it is for me to be here with you this morning. If I'm the most huggable pastor, then, Pastor Kyle, you have to be the most quotable pastor. You're the most quotable pastor. When I give him phone calls, sometimes I'll be like, "Dude, I'm trying to communicate flexibility toward church."

He's like, "Dude, healthy things grow and growing things change." I'm like, "Okay. That's really good." He's like, "Yeah. People need to have a mission in the world and a ministry in the church." I'm like, "Dude, where are you coming up with these things?" I'm like, "Where do you want to go for dinner?" He's like, "Dude, you can have steak, stew, or stromboli. Which one do you want?" I'm like, "How does he do it?!" He is the master of alliteration.

But seriously, from the bottom of my heart, man, I love you. I'm really grateful for you and your family. Margy, you too. We wouldn't be here, especially where we are now, as a church, if it wasn't for you and your leadership, so thank you so much. Give it up for your pastor, Pastor Kyle.

And not just for him. I want to thank *you*. I want you to know this past year has been incredible for us. We just celebrated two years about a month and a half ago. We moved into a 24/7 facility, which is unbelievable. Part of the reason we were able to do that is because of your generosity.

Earlier this year, we found out from a movie theater we were gathering in that we weren't going to be able to meet there in October. We were like, "What are we going to do?" because real estate in a city like Miami is very difficult to come by, but the Lord opened up this opportunity.

I remember sitting in New Orleans with Pastor Kyle, Pastor Dave, and Pastor Caleb. I'm like, "Dude, we have this opportunity. I don't know if we should do it. And what

if...? And what about this?" They were like, "Go for it." And we did it, and it has been such an incredible blessing. So, I want to thank you for giving to a place you haven't even been to. Some of you *have* actually been there, but most of you haven't.

I want you to know your generosity is directly impacting our church. Your prayers are the lungs of the church, not only here, but also in another part of the world. So, thank you so much. We're going to be in Acts, chapter 19, this morning. You can turn there. Let me pray for us, and then we'll get going.

Heavenly Father, we thank you this morning for the opportunity to be able to gather, reflect on your Word, and respond to your love. Thank you that we can walk into this place and be free because of what we just sang about, the blood of Jesus Christ. We praise you, Lord. I pray that you would open up our hearts, wherever we might find ourselves today.

Some of us who are joyful and walking with you... I pray that today you would multiply our joy. I pray for those who may be curious about the claims of Christ today, that you would reveal yourself to them, that you would meet us wherever we may be. If we're discouraged, Lord, would you please fill us up with your Spirit today as we look at your Word. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Have you ever wondered why so many Christians are bored with their faith? Christianity was not designed to be lived at anything less than 100 percent. It's sort of like when you commit yourself to a marriage relationship. It doesn't work unless you're fully committed. It's the same with Christianity. It cannot just be your side thing. Otherwise, you will get bored or you will get really frustrated.

In fact, when Jesus calls us to have a relationship with him, he calls us to come up and take our cross and walk with him. He's calling us to live in what a pastor from New York City calls the *redemptive edge*. I want to show you this graph that I've found really useful in my life. He describes, essentially, people in Christianity or in the kingdom of God across this span.

When you come into the kingdom of God, you can kind of proceed with caution. There are some people who come to church, and they're dipping their toes in. What's happening inside of their hearts and minds is they're saying, "You know what? You've got to be careful with this church thing. Let's not be too fanatical. We're going to go during Christmas and Easter, and maybe if they have another special event for my kids."

Then, at some point along this continuum, you move from caution to comfortable Christianity. This is where... "You know what? Okay. I'm going to go to church every weekend (except on key, critical football games during the season), and I want to

make sure they have something for my kids that it's going to fit my schedule." This is the place where you're coming to church to consume rather than contribute.

You want to make sure your pastor is funny and you'll have a really good kids' ministry. You can drop off the kids, you have a youth group, everything is settled, and it works just for you. This is where a lot of American Christianity is, or the church in the West. It can be between caution and comfort. Then there's another point where you go from comfort to this area of concern.

This is where people start getting a little worried about you, your family and friends. They're like, "Dude, um, what do you mean you're going to be at church three days this weekend for something called the *Weekender*? What is *that*? What do you mean you have a prayer group during the week, a DNA Group? What is that? You're giving to the church consistently out of the income you work so hard for?"

This is where people start getting concerned. Have you ever been there where your family is like, "Dude, what are you doing?" That's you, but then there's another level where the ministry of Jesus took place, and that was between criticism and darkness. Christianity lived at 100 percent is risky. It's adventurous Christianity. Jesus ate with sinners. He confronted traditions. He chose disciples that, most likely, you and I would not have chosen.

At the same time, it says in the Scriptures that Jesus came to destroy the works of the Devil. He was walking to push back darkness. He called you and me to be able to push back the darkness of this world through the power of the Spirit. Amen? So, what do we see? This is what we see in the book of Acts. You've been in it. There's adventure after adventure, walking by faith.

You can frame it like this: You see people taking personal risks to bring Christ to every relationship one person at a time. You see people taking risks to be able to not only proclaim the good news of Jesus but to also display his good works. But what happens when you begin to take personal risks to bring Christ to every relationship? Well, let's look at the text, Acts, chapter 19. Starting in verse 23, this is what Luke the physician writes. Look at this.

"About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, 'Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth.

And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with

hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship."

What happens when you take personal risks to bring Christ to every relationship? I'll tell you one thing that takes place. When you take personal risks to bring Christ to every relationship, your idols and the idols of the contexts you're ministering in will be exposed. When you live a kind of Christianity that requires faith and not sight, the idols inside of you and the idols around you will be exposed.

If you're here, and you don't deal with your idols, at some point your idols will deal with you. This is how the Puritan John Owen puts it: "Be killing sin or [sin] will be killing you." Today, if you're here, if you've grown up in church, like I did... I grew up in Venezuela, South America. I came here when I was 13 years old.

I grew up in the church. I heard about sin. I heard about idolatry, and at some point in my life, I did not take it seriously. You have to take your idols seriously or they will destroy your life. It's sort of like... Imagine a young couple that gets married and starts watching HGTV. They start dreaming about the house they're going to fix up that's going to cost three times as much as they originally thought.

They decide to move to a beautiful city called *Winston-Salem*, and they buy this historic fixer-upper. They're having an incredible time. They're painting the rooms, selecting the furniture, and fixing up the drywall. It takes them three months, and finally, this dude has to get to work.

He says, "Okay, honey. You know what? There's a small leak under the sink of the bathroom on the second floor, and I'm going to fix it next week." But what happens after next week? He didn't fix it. Don't get triggered. Listen. That week turns into a month. That month turns into a year. What was a small, imperceptible leak at one point... Now this little, tiny leak becomes a hole in the second floor.

Why am I sharing this story with you? Because if you don't deal with the leak, it has the capacity to bring down your house. It's the same with your idols. If you don't deal with them now, they're going to deal with you later. So, the question is, then...*How do we deal with them?*

01 ANTICIPATE RESISTANCE

Anticipate resistance from the outside. Here's how important dealing with idolatry is. If you take a look in the Scriptures, what's the first commandment? ***"You shall have***

no other gods before me." Then, in the New Testament, what's the greatest commandment? Jesus says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself."

In other words, this is of primary importance to God, and it should be of primary importance to us. In Acts, chapter 19, here's what's taking place. Paul has been preaching the gospel in the city of Ephesus, one of the great cities of antiquity, and there are incredible works happening. Churches are being planted. Disciples are being made.

In this particular narrative, if you look earlier, what you'll see is that there are some unusual miracles taking place. In fact, there's a moment where the Scripture says even the handkerchief of Paul is being taken to other people and that demons are coming out of people just by touching this handkerchief, and they're being healed.

One of my professors in seminary used to say, "Put that in your theological pipe and smoke it." I'm like, "Dude, what do I do with the theology of the handkerchief?" I don't know, but here's the point. There is a revival taking place because Paul has stepped out in faith and has taken great personal risk to bring Christ to the people of the city of Ephesus.

You can be sure that when you begin to advance the kingdom of God against the kingdom of darkness, you're going to encounter resistance. It's really interesting, because in verse 23, Luke says, ***"About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way."*** In other words, something outside of the ordinary was taking place. It's like the kingdom of darkness was mounting an assault against Christianity.

It was catalyzed by this man called *Demetrius*, a silversmith, who recognizes... He says, "This dude Paul says we can't build gods with our human hands." I'm like, "Yes. You cannot build a god with human hands." He gets his buddies together, and he says, "This dude is going to affect the economy. He's going to tear down the temple of Artemis and her magnificence."

Just to give you a picture of what this was like, of how big of a deal was taking place during that time, I want you to think back at last week. You were talking about Acts 17. How many of you have been to Athens or seen a picture of Athens? Okay. Not Georgia. Athens, Greece, by the way.

This is really cool. If you ever go to a Greek restaurant, you're going to see a picture of the Parthenon somewhere, the temple dedicated to Athena. If you stand anywhere in the city of Athens, you're going to behold her temple. You've seen it in pictures. You can't miss the magnificence of this edifice.

As incredible and grand as the Parthenon is, the temple of Artemis that was in Ephesus that is described here was four times the size of the Parthenon. Scholars tell us that if you were to walk into that temple, you would see 127 columns that rose up to 60 feet. Etched onto the stone, you would have seen the great works of sculptors, the Michelangelos of their time.

People from all over Asia used to pay homage. They used to make a pilgrimage in order to visit this temple to worship the goddess Artemis. This was no small cult. Christianity was breaking down strongholds, and in this moment, what the gospel is attacking and confronting is the idol the people had made in Artemis.

Whenever you take personal risks, whenever you preach the gospel, it's going to have consequences outside of an individual. We believe the gospel changes people and people change the world. What do you think is going to happen when you move into that new building in downtown and begin preaching the gospel?

What do you think is going to happen when you begin to take personal risks and start talking to your friends about Jesus, and they're like, "Yeah, cool, man, but what's your position on sexuality? And what's your position on..." These different ethical matters the Scripture is very clear on. What do you think is going to happen?

People will be confronted with their idolatry. That has a way of inciting resistance and opposition. If you and I are going to be equipped to handle idolatry, we cannot be surprised by this. We have to anticipate resistance. I remember this story. A revival was taking place. I think it was in Scotland. The farmers had to retrain their horses because the horses wouldn't respond to anything but cussing.

The move of God was so strong, and they had to change the way they were speaking, that it even affected the farming community for a couple of months. I want you to know I believe that God can do immeasurably more than we think or imagine. He's already doing a great work among you. I also believe there's more for you and more for us. Do you believe that?

If you want to step into that, you're going to have to confront your idols. You're going to have to anticipate resistance. And that resistance doesn't only come from outside of you. You're going to have to anticipate the resistance that comes from within you. Those idols are not just out there in the culture; they're in the throne room of your hearts.

How do you deal with your idols? You anticipate resistance from the outside, but you have to anticipate resistance from within. John, the beloved disciple, who walked with Jesus for over 10 years, wrote 1 John. Do you know how he ends that letter? He

says, ***"Little children, keep yourselves from idols."*** Anticipate resistance from within.

Look at verse 28 in Acts 19. ***"When they heard this..."*** When they heard what the silversmith was talking about. ***"...they were enraged and were crying out, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel."***

But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater." Put yourself into that moment. Think about what's taking place. There is a riot. Look at verse 32.

"Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'"

How does the human heart respond when we are confronted with idols? Well, when you look at Scripture, you're going to see that when we're confronted with our idolatry, we'll either avoid it or respond with anger. Avoidance looks something like this. Whenever somebody confronts you with your idolatry...

It's kind of what Paul talks about in Romans, chapter 1. He says that human beings exchange the truth for a lie. When you're confronted with your idol, you can choose to numb your mind by binging on Netflix shows all day long. This happens sometimes when you're a college student.

You're a freshman, and instead of thinking about the ultimate questions of life and "What's my calling and purpose?" and "What am I going to do with this career?" you can avoid the gospel altogether. "You know what? I'm just going to go party." Then what happens when the second semester comes? Reality sets in. The lights have dimmed, and the party is done. You lay your head on your pillow at night, and you're like, "Dude. Okay, I have to do something with my life." You've chosen to avoid your idols.

Or what happens when you're in the throes of raising kids? There's no house big enough that you can buy. There's no vacation grand enough that can satisfy the longing inside of you. There's nothing that can provide the comfort that will soothe

the turmoil going on inside of your soul because you've been avoiding this idol that's in your heart.

You can choose to avoid or, like what happens in this text, when you're confronted with your idol, you can respond in anger. Picture what's taking place in this text. They bring the disciples into this theater, with the exception of Paul. Now, when you read "theater" in Acts, chapter 19, it's not a room like *this*. I want you to think about the most epic amphitheater that has been carved out in a mountain, because that's what they did back then somehow.

There are 24,000 people who fit inside of this theater. It says in the text that there's confusion. They don't even know why they're there. They're just enraged. Haven't you felt that way sometimes when you're confronting idols, when you're preaching the gospel? People can just get angry. They don't even know why. There's no logic, no reason. You can't even have a conversation because something is going on inside of their heart.

You know the gospel is offensive, right? The gospel offends us because we're essentially confronted with the sinfulness of the human heart. That's what happened here in this text. They're responding in anger and in confusion. They are beginning to chant at the top of their lungs, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

02 UNDERSTAND THE DYNAMICS OF IDOLATRY

Why does the human heart respond in such irrational ways when confronted with our idols? Listen. You have to anticipate resistance from the outside, you have to anticipate resistance from within you, but you also have to know how idols work. You have to know how idols operate in your life. I want to give you a sketch of the dynamics of idolatry, because in this case, it begins with a lie.

See, idolatry begins with deception. This is as old as the garden of Eden. In this case, what's the lie? The lie is there's a meteorite that came down and landed on Ephesus, and somebody decided, "This rock must be worshiped." That is the root of Artemis of the Ephesians. It's a stone, an inanimate object. Somebody projected some value onto this particular stone, and they began to worship it.

Somebody began to say, "You know what? This is a goddess of fertility. If you want a family, if you want great intimacy in your life, if you want a great marriage, we must worship this rock." Idolatry begins with a lie. Isn't that what happens in the garden of Eden anyways? It begins with deception. Lies are so devious. They have the capacity to enslave our minds.

If you're here, and if part of what's going on inside of your mind, part of how the Enemy is tempting you... If you're saying things like, "Hey, you know what? If I just met the right person, I'd be happy and fulfilled for all the rest of my life," do not buy into that lie. Idols are so interesting. It's a good thing that has become an ultimate thing. It's a functional savior.

Your spouse or your loved one cannot save you. They cannot save you out of your sadness. They cannot save you out of depression. They *can* meet a particular longing. It is a beautiful thing to have a spouse, but they are not your saviors. Have you been deceived in this particular area? It's so common.

Idolatry begins with a lie, but then that lie leads you to doubt. When I talk about doubt, I'm not saying idols will scream at you, like, "Atheism!" No. Sometimes I feel like when I meet with some of my friends... You know, "Oh, atheism. Evolution." I'm like, "Guys, listen. It's a lot more deceptive than that."

The lie turns into a doubt, doubting the goodness of God first. "Is God holding out on me? Does he have my best interests in mind? Do I actually really believe he is who he says he is and he's going to do what he said he's going to do?" You doubt the goodness of God, but then something else happens with idolatry. You begin to doubt the consequences of sin. "Is this really that bad?" You begin to doubt the consequences of sin.

Just a couple of months ago... There's a publication in Miami called the *New Times*. They came out with a disheartening article that, essentially, Miami has the highest number per capita of content creators on a website called *OnlyFans*. Now, if you know anything about this particular website, you know it's mainly used for pornography.

That means that, for whatever reason, more people per capita in Miami create inappropriate, pornographic, sinful content that destroys minds, fuels human trafficking, and breaks up marriages, et cetera. Now listen. I want you to know I love my city. Whatever image you have of Miami, it's not like *Miami Vice*. I don't want you to have that image. It's incredible. God is doing an incredible work there, but this is one of our idols: the idol of sensuality, the idol of vanity.

If you were to meet with one of these content creators who have been made in the image of God, do you know what they'd probably say? "Dude, our city is just really expensive, and I'm just trying to make a living. I thought this wouldn't be that bad." That's what happens when you begin to doubt the consequences of sin. If you don't pay attention to that, what happens in your life is that sin will begin to destroy you.

You won't see the brokenness of it until it's too late. Deception turns into doubt, doubting the goodness of God and doubting the consequences of your sin. I want you

to know if you are engaged right now... If you have a stronghold in your life (not just a struggle...a stronghold), I came today to remind you from the Word of God that this is serious and it has to be dealt with.

That deception turns into doubt. That doubt leads to disobedience. It leads to you actually then sinning against God, and that disobedience turns into disaster. There's a famous preacher by the name of Adrian Rogers who has this quote: "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay."

Here's a question for you...*What is the lie you've been believing that, whether you want to or not, will ultimately end up in disaster?* What is that lie today? Think about your relationships. Think about your work. Think about your finances. Think about what you long for the most. What is the lie you've been believing that, if you're not careful with it, will lead you down this path of destruction? What is it?

03 DECISIVELY DETHRONE YOUR IDOL

In this particular text, we see how when you take personal risks, you will see the kingdom of darkness oppose you. You have to anticipate resistance from the outside. You have to anticipate resistance from within. You have to know how idolatry works. You have to understand the dynamics of sin and idolatry. Finally, you have to decisively dethrone your idol.

This is a decision we can take this morning. We can do that today. If you are here, and you are captivated, for some reason, by an idol inside of you, today is the day Jesus wants to set you free by the power of the Holy Spirit. You have to make a decision. It's interesting, because this text doesn't give us a formula for dethroning our idols. Now, if you read the book of Acts, you will see different instances on how this happens.

Essentially, the way the text ends, there's a riot. People are chanting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" There is confusion, because that's what idols create, and then the city clerk comes out and essentially says, "Everybody just chill out for a moment. Chill out. If you want to deal with these Christians, just take them to court. The courts are open, because we don't want to get in trouble."

Out of self-preservation, they stop the riot, and Christians continue to preach the gospel through Asia Minor. The question, then, for you and me is...*How do we dethrone the idols of our hearts?* Well, there is another instance in the book of Acts where people respond in anger. In Acts, chapter 7, the first martyr of the church, Stephen, begins to proclaim the gospel to religious people.

It says in the text that when they heard this, they gnashed their teeth, and they responded with violence. What do we learn from that text about dealing with your idols? Listen to this. If you want to deal with your idol decisively today, you have to move from resistance to repentance.

Stephen says this in Acts, chapter 7, when he's preaching the gospel. He says something so interesting. I want you to hear what he says to the crowd. He says, "***You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit.***" Did you know you can resist the Holy Spirit of God? "You are always resisting the Holy Spirit."

Here's the question for you and me today: Where are you resisting the Holy Spirit? Where today are you resisting the Holy Spirit of God who has told you so many times, who is reminding you even today as you look at this text? Where are you resisting the Holy Spirit?

For some of you, Jesus is inviting you into a relationship with him, and he has been doing so. You can look at your life in different circumstances and see that he has been drawing you to himself. Are you resisting his offer of redemption? Today is a day where he wants to come and take over your life and be the Lord of your life so you can dethrone your idolatry and trust and experience him.

For some of you, maybe you've been resisting the Holy Spirit in your family, in your relationships. Think about your children. Think about your ministry. Think about your vocation. Where are you resisting the Holy Spirit? What is the idol that is standing between you and God? What's the idol that has been keeping you from actually walking in the purpose God has for you?

Listen. Maybe what's standing before you and your one person is the idol you're unwilling to deal with today. We want to take personal risks to bring Christ to every relationship, but how can we do that if we're unwilling to deal with our idolatry? Have you made a decision to deal with your idol today?

Maybe you'd say, "Pastor Carlos, I want to. I've been trying to. I just can't seem to get rid of this thing. I can't shake this bad habit." If that's you, then I want you to know you're in good company. You remind me of a story of a little hobbit named Frodo. Do you guys know who Frodo is? Anybody watch *The Lord of the Rings* in this place?

By the way, I didn't know Pastor Caleb was a huge fan of this book until last night when he corrected my illustration. If you haven't taken the time to watch the greatest trilogy of all time, we have a prayer team available to you. Just take a little time, 17 hours of your weekend, and then you'll get through it. Extended editions only.

Here's what happens. Frodo is a little hobbit, which are smaller creatures with hairy feet that live in the Shire. Because of the purity of his heart, he has been tasked to take this ring of power that represents evil, forged by the Dark Lord Sauron himself in the fires of Mount Doom. He has to take it back to where the ring was forged.

If you read the story or have seen the movies, then you know it took so much. He endures betrayal. He endures pain. I mean, this dude goes through everything around this country called *Middle Earth* in order to be able to take the ring back to the place where it was supposed to be destroyed.

Guess what? Finally, he enters Mount Doom, and in that last moment where evil is supposed to be erased, vanquished forever, do you know what Frodo does? He lets us down! This dude went through all of these different things in order to kill evil, but at the end of the day, as soon as he approaches the fire, he's not able to take off his ring and actually throw it in the fire.

It's a great illustration that reminds us that the power of idolatry and the power of sin cannot be defeated by the triumph of the will. But listen. It needs to be defeated by the triumph of grace. He needed somebody outside of himself, the creature called *Gollum*, to cut off his finger in order for evil to be destroyed.

In an infinitely way more incredible way, what happens is Jesus Christ knew that you and I had been cut off from the Father because of our idolatry and because of our sin, and he chose to be the one who bore our sins on that cross. He walked a life that you couldn't have walked, and he died the death that you and I deserved in order to rise on that third day to give you and me the power to deal with our sin and to walk in freedom. Amen? How many of you believe that?

Here's what we're going to do. The band is going to sing a couple of songs, and I want to invite you to pray with me this morning as we come to the Lord and deal with our idols.

Father, we're coming before you. I pray that you would reveal to us now where we are resisting your Holy Spirit.

In fact, if that's you, if there's an area of your life where you feel like, "Man, I've been resisting the Holy Spirit," and you can point to that right now, why don't you just lift it and bring it before the Lord this morning? Say, "Father, I want to stop resisting your will, and I want to surrender to yours."

Holy Spirit, we're here. We declare together we want to stop resisting your will and submit our will to yours. Would you help us to destroy the idols of our lives so we can

walk in the ways we're supposed to walk that you've called us to? In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Church, I want to encourage you. In your booklet, there are going to be some questions that you'll see on the screen. If you're looking for ways to resist your idols, there's going to be a great tool that was handed out in your workbook. I want to encourage you to take this time over the next two songs, and let's respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit so we can bring Christ to every relationship one person at a time. Amen?