

We come this morning to our penultimate study in spiritual warfare. Three more weeks. Three more weeks? Three more weeks? Two more weeks. Two more weeks after this, yes. Three including this one. So we'll finish the third temptation of Christ Next week and then we'll look at one of the Psalms, the battle Psalms, I think Psalm 91 is what we'll finish off on our last study. We're in the second temptation of Jesus again this morning. I wanna come back and give some practical words about idolatry, but let's pick up our reading. In verse five, this is the word

of God. And the devil took Jesus up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time and said to him, to you I will give all this authority and their glory for it has been delivered to me and I give it to whom I will. If you will then worship me, it'll all be yours. And Jesus answered him, it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and him only you shall serve. And he took, and that's the next temptation. Come back to that next week.

Let's pray together. Father in heaven, we thank you this morning for your word and its truth. We come, Lord, to consider one of the most practical aspects of our spiritual life, how we allow God's substitutes to take your place and to challenge your place in our hearts and lives. And I pray that utterance will be given to me that it might make these things clear and help the brethren this morning come to a deeper understanding of the myriad of ways that our hearts manufacture false gods, that we might get to the heart of the reason why we so often trip up along the way in the spiritual life of faith and worship. And we offer these prayers in

Jesus' name. Amen. So in these temptations, you remember, just a quick recap for those of you maybe who weren't here before. In these temptations, Luke sets Christ forth as the second Adam. If you read the previous chapter, you have the genealogy of Jesus, and it ends with Adam, the son of God. So you've got Adam, the son of God by creation, and Jesus, the son of God by eternal generation. The two sons set forth. And just

as Adam stood as the representative of all mankind, and at the beginning of his ministry

of representation, as he represented all of us, all of us were inside him, like those Russian dolls with the little baby dolls inside them. Every human being is inside Adam, and in Adam's sin, we will sin all. If he falls, we all fall with him. And as he begins his ministry

of representation, the first thing he does is meet the devil. And of course, Adam did fall and we fell with him and in him. And Paul unpacks that teaching

in Romans 5 verse 12. Therefore as through one man, sin entered the world and death through sin and thus death spread

to all men because all sinned in Adam. You'll find it also in 1 Corinthians 15. No time to go there this morning. Luke also sets Christ forward, not just as the second Adam, but as the new Israel. If you remember, Israel were also tested during their wilderness wanderings. And they were tested for 40 years. And if you listen to Christ's temptations, and you remember, when you're dealing with Christ's temptations, the way to get to the heart of each temptation is not to listen to the devil, but to listen to the Savior. Jesus gives the perfect answer to every test the devil sends his way, right? So you listen to Jesus, and all of Christ's answers, you remember, were taken from one book of the Bible. It was the book of... Deuteronomy, very good, excellent, we've been listening. Book of Deuteronomy, in Book of Deuteronomy, you remember, it's the second law, Deuteronomos, the second law, and in that you get the second retelling of the Ten Commandments, but you also get a description of the tests that Israel underwent during their wilderness wanderings, and principally there were three tests. The test of obedience, would they obey God or not? The test of worship, would they worship God or not? Would they put God first or put themselves first and their grumbling hearts first? And the third test was the test of trust. Would they trust God whenever trials came along, when the food ran out, when there was a drought? Would they trust God's word or would they always be demanding fresh evidence that God was trustworthy, fresh evidence that God would come true? God's kindness yesterday, they thought, was a day late. We need fresh evidence today that God can be trusted. His word's not enough. We'll look at that next week. And Deuteronomy explains how Israel failed those three tests again and again and again. And Luke sets Christ forward as a second Israel, like Israel. He's tested in the wilderness. They were tested for 40 years. He was tested for 40 days, but the number 40 is kind of parallel, and it connects the one with the other. And Christ, in these three temptations, faces the test of obedience. Will he eat when God says he can eat? Or will he act independently of his father and make bread on his own terms to satisfy his own hunger? And the devil says, you're God's son, you know you can do it, make some bread for yourself. And Jesus, you remember, said, man. The first word carries the weight of his wisdom, his genius, and his piety, man. I'm not here to be God's son. I'm here to be man. And as man, I eat what my father eats. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. He passes the test of obedience. Here, he's passing the test of worship. The great test was, will he hold true in his allegiance to God? Will he obey the first commandment? Will he keep his laser focus to stay on mission? To win the world, he must endure the cross, despise the shame, and lean into

the outer darkness of Calvary. But the devil offers him an easier way. You don't want to go to the cross. He doesn't say that explicitly, but he offers them the world. You can win the world by just worshiping me, just for a brief moment. Just do it once, and I'll give you the world. And the implication is you'll not have to go to the cross to get the world. You can just bow down and worship me. There's another way, an easier way, a less costly way. And Jesus answers, you remember, from Deuteronomy 6. You can listen to it online if you missed it last week. You shall worship the Lord your God. Him only you shall serve. It's a first commandment issue. I'm not gonna worship you, Satan. I'm gonna worship my Father, now and always. But that raises the specter for you and me about our idolatry and our penchant for idols. Now we like to think that we're past that. That's the kind of thing primitive people do in umbo bungo land. I don't wanna hear from umbo bungo land, I apologize. But do you know the people in loin cloths who walk about half naked and cut themselves and do all kinds of weird things, they are the ones who worship idols. But we're not past idolatry. Her heart, Calvin tells us, are constantly manufacturing idols. I want you to listen to me. When I do premarital counseling with couples, which now mostly Pastor Josh Squires has taken over from me, he does a much better job. But my first lesson, and the young couple look at me with askance, I talk about idols. Because whether you know it or not, I said, the greatest struggle in your marriage is that you both will find out that you're worshiping different gods. That you're quasi taking your eyes off the true God and looking to false gods. And most people have one or two, it's like the trunk of a tree. Think of a tree in your mind's eye. The leaves represent your words and your deeds. The twigs and the branches coming back from those leaves represent the thoughts behind your words and your deeds. What you're thinking, what you're wanting, how you're feeling, what your desires are, your hopes are, your dreams. And you follow those trunks and branches back and you get to a main trunk of a tree. And most trees have one or two main trunks. And most human beings, those trunks in my illustration represent idols, the primary things that drive you, other than God, to get out of bed in the morning. And most of us have one or two of them. and getting to the heart of them. When you're fighting your sins, you can be cutting off the leaves all day long. Bad things you shouldn't say, bad things you shouldn't do, but that takes a lot of work and you need to fight there. But it's also much more effective if you go back downstream and deal not just with your thoughts, not just with your desires and your choices and so forth, but all the way back down to the heart of the heart of the matter. which is what's really driving me in this thing. When I'm turning away from God, what is controlling me the way only God should? So let's think

about it for a second. I want to walk through this with you and help you think through this subject. Because if you think about it, I remember hearing a man who had a ministry dealing with sexual addiction, and he had a problem with sexual addiction in the past himself, and he explained that he suddenly realized that there was one great reason why he was looked to sex to satisfy him. But it wasn't just in sex, it was in every other area of his life, that one primary motivating desire that was not for God, but a sinful desire, it was really that one desire that ruled all his other desires and really explained all of his other sins. And so when you're married, I say to the young couple, if you can figure out what really drives my husband, what really drives my wife, it'll make it much easier to deal with their sins compassionately because you realize you're being deceived by the empty promises of false gods. Let's work through this together. First of all, what is an idol? Well, an idol is God, a God substitute, right? Something, anything that challenges God's place as number one in your heart and life. That's obvious, right? One of my friends from previous in Savannah was a man called Dr. Craig Rowe, and he was a biblical counselor, and he had a fantastic way of defining an idol. I've never forgotten it. When I tell you, you never forget it either. An idol is anything that controls you or consumes you, anything that controls you or consumes you the way only God should. An idol is anything that controls you or consumes you, the way only God should. That's worth writing down if you have a pen and paper. And Calvin said, of course, the thing about our hearts is that they are a factory of idols. We're constantly manufacturing fresh things to take God's place, to control us the way only God should. So what are your idols this morning? What things control you the way only God should? What things consume you the way only God should? And how can you know? Let's take a deep dive. How do idols function? Well, they actually function precisely the same, false gods function precisely the same way the true God functions in our heart. It's like a photographic negative, you might say. How does God function in our life? Well, he calls for sacrificial service, right? Now the thing about the sacrifices God requires you and I to make, God requires you and I to sacrifice ourselves for him. And to sacrifice ourselves for others. A husband sacrificing himself for his wife and his children. A wife sacrificing herself for her husband and her children. Children sacrificing themselves for their parents, and for their neighbors, and so forth. And the thing about that kind of sacrifice, the kind of sacrifice that true God requires, is that it brings life, not death. God requires sacrifices, but it brings life, not death. Idols also require sacrifices, but their sacrifices are much more bloodthirsty. An idol will not ask you to sacrifice yourself. An idol will ask you

to sacrifice others. Think about a husband who idolizes his job. It's all about him, his success, or maybe his pride in providing well for his family, and his job comes first. Well, the job is functioning as God, and the job requires a sacrifice. Who gets sacrificed? The wife. The children. There's other responsibilities at church. Does that sacrifice bring life to them or death? It brings death to them. Bloodthirsty. Or think about a wife, a mother, and she idolizes her children. And she thinks, if I can just control every detail of my life, if I can go all tiger mama and just control every detail of their life, they will be safe and everything will be okay. And so she grips them and she squeezes them to try and just keep them safe, control them, help them stop. We help them stop that awful habit that kids have that when in stupid, they don't stop stupid, right? So you just think, if I can just control every detail, what ends up happening is that idolatrous desire starts to kill the children and strangle them and crush them. Or maybe she idolizes their happiness so and so when dad comes home and he disciplines them and they're unhappy, well then she'll sacrifice him. and back them over him. And that idolatrous desire will bring death to her marriage and death to her home. We've all seen that, right? Or the child who, he wants to feel like he's a success, right? Teenager. But he's not doing very well on the basketball team. He's not doing very well in school. He gets nagged all the time, right? And he thinks Call of Duty. If I can just get it, if I can have to get this ultimate kill streak in Call of Duty, I'll feel like I'm something online in the video game. And that becomes his idol. And he sacrifices everything for that. His relationship with his parents, his schoolwork, and everything else. What's controlling him the way only God should is the sense that I can be something online. in my ranking in a Call of Duty team or something, right? You see how the sacrifices, when you sacrifice for an idol, it always brings death. So gods require sacrifices, good ones or bad ones. Gods also make you promises. They promise you life. So when God makes promises, you can put his promises in three buckets. Satisfaction, security, significance. Trust me, love me, serve me, and I will satisfy you. I will make known to you the path of life. In my presence, there's fullness of joy. At my right hand, there are pleasures forevermore. You can be satisfied. Well, idols also make promises. You follow me, and I'll make known to you the path of life. I'll make you happy. I'll tickle your itches. I'll quench your thirst. I'll make you happy forever. God also promises security. I'll be your refuge. I'll be your strength. I'll be your help in tight places, always close at hand. My faithfulness will be your shield and your buckler. Trust me, I'll not let you down. Idols will also make you promises

of security. You organize your finances, which is a good thing to do, we'll get to that in a second, but you organize your finances, you control it, you stress over it, you worry over it, and you get all of your 401k in order, and you make sure that it's all invested in the right pot, and your 401k will make you happy forever. Significance. We all want to feel that we are something, that we're not nothing. We want to feel that our life has mattered in the lives of the right people, in the right way, at the right time, and for the right reason. We want to feel that when we die, people will miss us. Where do you find significance? God says, let not the wise man boast in his wisdom. Let not the rich man boast in his wealth. Let not the mighty man boast in his strength, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he knows and understand me. Knowing God is what makes a man of God or a woman of God significant. That I am in Christ. But idols will also promise you to be significant. You buy the next dress you can't afford. You buy the sports car in your mid-life crisis or your later life crisis, and you'll feel young again. You'll feel significant. When you drive onto the forecourt of the gas station, people will look at you and think, wow, he's really something. She's really something. She must have done something mighty in her life to drive a car like that. And we can believe the lies of significance. So the true God and the false God promise you satisfaction, security, and significance. The problem is false gods never keep the promises they make you. More about that in a second. So that's pretty helpful. Now for Christians, this is also a mind-blowing subject. The world will change color when you realize this. Idols, false gods, fall into two broad categories. Bad things you shouldn't want at all, like taking malicious pleasure and hurting people. No Christian should ever want that, and few of us do, at least regularly, right? So there are bad things we shouldn't want at all. But for Christians, Most of our idols are good things that we want too much. But it's the goodness of the idol that deceives us to its wickedness. Augustine spoke of disordered loves. That sin happens and idolatry happens when we get our loves out of order. We love God first. We love others second. Our wife. our children, our neighbor, even our enemy, and we love ourselves last of all. And whenever you have your loves in order, everything is great. The problem is we get everything out of order. We take God from the top of the list, we move to the top of the list, and nobody is safe. Now, follow my logic here a second. Think of the good things you want too much. Ladies, some of you here long for a godly husband. You attend all the Bible studies. You do your devotions every day. Your husband is the spiritual equivalent of a bump on the log. He hardly ever goes to church unless you nag him. He never does family worship. He never reads his Bible. He never prays with you or for

your family. You have to even remind him to give thanks for the food before the meal. And you long for a godly husband. But that longing for a godly husband becomes so great in your mind that it's the most important thing in your life, and you begin to get bitter and angry towards your husband, and frustrated, and you stab him in the back when you're with your ladies over coffee, purely for prayer. But you complain about him, and you're always grumbling about, I just want a godly husband. And it starts to consume you, and it robs you of happiness. And God says to you, Let's talk about your desire for a godly husband. Well, what could be bigger and better than a godly husband? It's a good thing that I want. And God says, actually, I'm bigger than a godly husband. I'm more important. Or the parents, you want a godly child. We've all been there. And you got six kids, there's always one of them doing their own thing not so well. And you want a godly child. And your child's been working out, maybe in the garage in the morning, or they're kind of been straightening their hair or doing something, and on Facebook, and you ask them, have you had your devotions yet? And they say, I'll do it later, Dad. And the top of your head blows off, and you give them a lecture, a long lecture, by putting God first. You get angry, and you try and school them toward godliness. And you walk away from the discussion, having driven them away from you, which is a poor strategy, by the way, for drawing them toward God. And you feel momentarily good about yourself, having given them the first commandment lecture. And then God says to you, you know, there's something more important than a godly child. And you say, what's more important than a godly child? And God says, me. And didn't I tell you the wrath of, what part of the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God do you not understand? And suddenly you realize a desire for a godly child has just become more important to me than God himself. and it's robbed me of happiness, peace of heart, joy, and a good thing. You should want your kids to be godly. Women, you should want your husbands to love you. Maybe you're talking to your husband, I want my husband to love me, and you're pouring your heart out to him, and his phone dings, he looks down at his phone just for a moment, and you just feel enraged. Am I not more important to you than that blinking phone? And your husband, you want your wife to respect you, but she treats you as if you're an idiot half the time, because you are most of the time. But it frustrates you, right? But you want the respect of your wife. A good thing to want, you want the love of your husband. A good thing to want, you want godly children. But if those things become first in your heart and life, a good thing has become an ultimate thing. and therefore it's become an evil thing. It's become an idol that controls you the way only God should. Here's the problem though. The goodness of the idol.

I want a godly child, a godly husband, a godly wife. She just respects me and honors me. Because it's a good thing, we often forget that if it becomes the number one thing, it's become an idol and therefore a bad thing. But the goodness of it deceives us to the evil of it when it becomes first in our hearts. How can you discover your idols?

And my word, the time has gone. If you need to go to work, that's okay. Some of you work for a living, and I only work on Sundays, so that's good for me. But if you need to nip out, there's no problem. I'll try and be quick. Okay, quickly. First of all, when do you become sinfully angry? Now anger's not always sinful. Anger's a beautiful thing in God's order of the universe. Anger is a passion God intends to motivate you. to protect what really matters and to punish those who threaten it. So we were having a chat on my screened-in porch, and Eliza, my 10-year-old outside playing in the garden, and a big canny Corso dog, which are huge, vicious lion hunters, ran into the garden and began attacking Eliza. And I went, well, I've got five other kids, you know, easy come, easy go. That would not be a good recommendation. If I got up and went, I should help her, but I'm terrified it's a big dog, it might bite me. That wouldn't be good either. But if that happened, God designs anger to get me up off my backside and get me out into the garden to fight that dog and protect my daughter. And when that happens, anger is a beautiful thing that brings life. Anger is the passion God intends to motivate you to protect what really matters and to punish those who threaten it. Here's the thing. We get the what really matters question wrong, right and royally every day. And when that happens, our anger will become a destructive thing, punishing people who stand on our toes, who frustrate our plans, who get in our way, who knock over our idols. So whenever you become sinfully angry, It's one of the biggest red flags that there's an idol at play somewhere. The question is, what is it? Second question is, when do you become sinfully anxious? We become anxious when our life is threatened. When a treasure of ours that promises us satisfaction, security, significance, if my children would just be godly and do well in life, I could be happy and everything would be okay. But if that starts coming off the wheels and I start getting anxious, I'm not looking to God, I'm not trusting God. There's never anxiety found in trusting God. When I'm afraid, I will trust in you. But if I start worshipping the welfare of my children and they're not doing well, I find myself becoming anxious. So when you get anxious about things, it's always a sign that you're looking to something to be your ultimate source of satisfaction, security, and significance that you know is in danger of letting you down. And so anxiety can point you back to your idols too. A third thing, what do you want so badly in order that you are willing to sin in order to



get it? So I've counseled many men through pornography struggles. And men have a thousand reasons for using pornography, thousands of reasons. But a common one is they just want a woman to look at them with desire. And the girls in the magazines and the girls on the websites always look at them with desire. And they look at them as if they matter. They look at them as if they're attractive and powerful and desirable. And that's what draws them in. It's not just looking at a naked body, it's wanting someone to look at them with desire, or to feel desired. But they want that so badly, they're willing to sin against God and their wife in order to get it. What do you want so badly that you are willing to sin in order to get it? Answer that question and you're just listing your idols. Fourth thing. Where has life really hurt you in the past? A friend of mine said, find your people's pains and pull them up like weeds and you'll find at the bottom of them the idols clinging to their roots. Where has life disappointed you? Where has life left you being abandoned, frustrated, hurt, let down, betrayed? We don't like those things and we tend to try and build fences of security, idolatrous fences of security to protect us from that ever happening to us again. Maybe you shared your heart with someone and they spread it all over town. And so you never want to be let down again and so you rob yourself of the joys of community and you never share your heart, you keep it all bottled in. Whereas life hurts you. And you probably find your idols lurking alongside, promising you protection, promising you security. If you just look to me, they'll say, I'll keep you safe. I'll never let that happen to you again. Those are the major ways of idolatry. When to become sinfully angry, when to become sinfully anxious, what do you want so badly that you're willing to sin in order to get it, and where has life really hurt you in the past? When you find your idol, what can you do? Well, finding it's a huge help. God have said you'll find one or two Idols, like the boy, the teenager I talked about at the start of the sermon, looking for significance on video games, feeling significant is a libel, feeling that he matters, that he's successful. Well, that idol will control them at every other area of life. When his parents criticize him, when his dad says, you got a C in your math, son, are you a waster? He gets defensive, why? He's defending the idol, because his dad's making him feel insignificant, a failure. And you'll find, it's true, every human being has one or two primary disordered desires that control them the way only God should. And they explain the reason not just why you commit your greatest sin, but they explain why you commit almost every sin. They're like a mother's ant nest under the ground, but the satellites pop up all over your yard. And you can kill the ants coming out of each satellite. That's

frustrating and difficult. Or you can kill the mother nest. So you can figure out what is it that really consumes me, controls me. Like one of my idols, for example, is convenience. I hate feeling inconvenienced. I want my life to be easy, not cause me trouble. So I drive home from work, and the kids have left, this has never happened, but imagine it did happen, and the kids have left, abandoned their bicycles on the driveway. and it's raining. So I get out of my car and move the bicycles over onto the grass and then get back in my car, by which time I'm drenched, drive into the house and I walk in as mad as a wet hen. Why am I so angry? Because my kids dare to disinconvenience me. where I'm climbing up at the soffit boards of the house, trying to kind of screw in stuff or fix things, and I've got like three or four screws in my mouth, or a box of screws in my hand, and the DeWalt screwdriver thing-a-jigger, and I drop the screws, and they all fall down to the bottom. And I leave the DeWalt screwdriver on top of the ladder and go down to the bottom to pick up the screws. And I could curse like a sailor, I'm so angry. And then I look up, and down comes the DeWalt screwdriver and cracks me in the head, right? And they get angry. Why am I angry? Because it's frustrating. And the job didn't go as easily as I wanted it to go. Right? And that idolatry will trip me up at every single area of life. People inconvenience me. So when you find your idol, you've got to bring it to the cross. And see one who loves you so much. Idols will always ask you to kill yourself or kill others. We get a terrible picture of that at the abortories in our society, young girls. And maybe there's a few here not so young girls who made that mistake years ago. And your idol really was bloodthirsty. It was a desire to protect your life and your vision for your life and your hopes and your plans and your dreams. And for that to happen, a sacrifice had to be made. And you go to the cross and you see one who was willing to die in your place to atone for all of your sins, even that sin. And you look to him and you lean upon him. And you also learn, looking at him on the cross, that dying is the way to life. It's as Christ dies that we get life. And as we die to our sins and to our idols, that life comes. Because laying down your idols... If money's an idol of yours, right, and financial security is an idol of yours, or the stuff money can buy you, because money's just a tool for buying your treasure, so you use money as a tool to buy treasure. And then the thought of giving money to support a missionary. Or maybe tithing for the first time in your life is overwhelming because you've got to give up your idol and it feels like death. But you look at the cross and you realize that in God's world, death is the way to life. And it's by dying, by laying our life down. He who seeks to hold on to his

life, Jesus says, will lose it. Mine. And you hold on to your life and you lose it. He who lays down his life for my sake and the gospels will find it. Or maybe one of your idols is being right, or not being criticized, and your wife's criticizing you, and you have to just let it down and say, maybe she's right, let me listen to her, she's a sensible person, maybe I need to hear this. And you lay down your idol, and you go to the cross, and you look to her, and you listen to her, and you try to get to the heart of what's concerning her, and because it concerns her, it concerns you, and you listen and you learn. And as you die, and it can feel like dying, And as that great philosopher Clint Eastwood said in the outlaw Juicy Wheels, dying's a poor way to make a living, boy, but it's a way to get to heaven as we look to Christ and lay our sins down and lay ourselves down and pour ourselves out and give ourselves up and resolve to let nothing control us the way only God should. If you wanna think more about this, Tim Keller's got a fantastic book, Counterfeit Gods, really helpful. He goes into more of this at a deeper level than I have time to go today. But it really is a huge subject, and if you think about this, it'll give you practical hands and feet to really get beyond dealing with the leaves of your life. and the branches or the twigs and getting beyond even the branches and getting right down to the heart of why do I sin? Why am I so easily distracted from the true God and spend so much of my time serving false gods who promised me life but they will give me death? Christ offers you death. Christ calls a man, he bids you come and die, but he promises you life through that death. Are you weary of your idols, Jesus says? Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am meek and lonely of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Let's pray together. Father, I thank you for these dear brothers and sisters, and their patients pray that these words will minister Christ to their hearts. You'll help us understand, search us through God, try our heart, and see if there'll be any idolatrous way in us, and lead us in the everlasting way. For Jesus' sake we pray, amen.