

Straw Man Strategy
God judges Israel for Idolatry
Ties that Bind Series – Part 5
Je 2:4-5, 12-13
February 7-8, 2026

Introduction

- What do you want out of life? What are your life goals? more practical. What are you shooting for? What matters to you?
 - Is it a **spouse** and a **marriage**?
 - Is it a **healthy family with kids**?
 - Is it a **home** that you call yours and a place to put down roots?
 - Is it **fun and adventure**?
 - Is it exceling at **work** and becoming the best?
 - Is it **making your mark** on the world in a significant way?
 - Is it using your gifts and talents to become **influential** or **famous**?
 - Is it to become a **millionaire**?
 - **What is it?**
- Assessing our lives from the outside – too often we think **we believe one thing**. So, **let's do a quick assessment based on metrics** .
 - What takes up most of your time? What fills your calendar? – **last 6 mths, work? TV? kids? travel? errands** for the house?
 - If I looked at your bank account, what would I see that you spend your money on? **assessments we do as a church = demanding our attention, or we are putting our attention on. your last year's budget: rent or mortgage? eating out? groceries? fun? utilities? looking a certain way** (clothes, car payment, beauty products, etc.)? **Retirement? Investments?**
 - Why does this matter? – it answers a very important question...

What Are We TRADING our LIVES For?

- The Year of Breakthrough – **examining areas of our lives where we are stuck, bound, trapped, and are not living the lives that God designed us to live**. Breakthrough to God's freedom.
- Jeremiah Series – 6 parts = **Israel's darkest period**
- Series So Far – **six things causing God to judge Israel**
 1. **Rejection of identity – Failure to be who they were designed to be.**

2. Selfishness & Disloyalty – our HEARTS long for other things = spiritual adultery. PERSONAL
3. Hardhearted Apathy – Ignoring God.
4. Ignoring Injustice (Judah) – Harming others is the key here.
5. Idolatry (misplaced trust) – Trust in STUFF. PRACTICAL
 - Difference between week 2 and this week: Spiritual adultery vs. Idolatry.
 - Spiritual Adultery - Week 2 (Rodney) = what holds our heart. PERSONAL
 - Idolatry – what we trust in and invest in to make our lives better. money, power, fame, influence, etc. PRACTICAL.

Lesson

- Je 2:4–5, 12-13 – *“Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the clans of the house of Israel. ⁵ Thus says the LORD: “What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless?...Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, ¹³ for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.””*
- Let’s talk about Hope – what’s going to make it all better? What would need to happen for you to feel you arrived, you received what you dreamed about? What’s that picture in your mind that you are hoping for?
- Our existential crisis: We cannot self-sustain – Baby in a field; adult in Sahara; Edge of space? Die. Why? Because we cannot self-sustain. We need certain elements to be added: namely air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing in order for us to continue living at the most base level. We need to get those things OUTSIDE of ourselves. We are reliant on those things. We need those things. We have to be in a space where we can TRUST that we can get access to those things. Right? Okay but I don’t personally know anyone who is only seeking to live at the base level of existence.
- A list of things we tend to trust in other than God: 7 most common things that we tend to trust in and desperately cling to for happiness, provision, security, and meaning.

1. Money – It tends to get us a lot of things on the rest of this list so it's a catch-all. Universal purchaser = easily becomes a god/idol. Why? Because it can do a lot of things that God is supposed to do: get us things we need, acquire security, draw attention from others, catalyze influence, enhance power, etc. It is a means to a human trying to fill their earthly needs. Because of the temptation to trade money with God as an anemic version, Jesus warned against its influence in our lives.
 - Mt 6:24 - *"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."*
2. Attention and Fame – some of us truly believe that if we had enough attention from the world, if we were famous enough, our cup would finally be full and we could be proud of who we are. We will put all of our efforts into the aspects of our lives that draw people's focus. It could be being famous for our abilities, our achievements, or our beauty, or our money. The goal is almost totally on gaining affirmation and attention. *The hope is that our fame will secure us a spot of importance and thereby investment by others.*
3. Power and Influence – help us gain control in the world. It is both a seeking for power as well as security. We may believe that if we are on top no one can harm us. No one can take our things away. No one can demean us. *We seek to dominate so that we feel important and significant.* We deeply hope that being king will chase all our inner demons away.
4. Human Providers –all attempts and plans to get someone else to care for us and provide for us. We put all of our effort to lock down and secure this relationship because it's our means and ways to get what we want and need. Our world is less about self-development for independence and more for attaching to another person's stability or provision.
5. Relationships – who live through other people. Our relationships give us value. All that we do is in relation to others around us. We dress for them, spend time with them, crave their affirmation, need them, rely on them. We say things like, 'I would die if I didn't have so and so in my life.' It's an inappropriate reliance on another human being or beings.

6. Religious Systems – Other religions or simply a religious form of Christianity. We put our trust that if we are truly good people things should work out for us.
 7. Self – although this sounds like a catch-all category it's worth mentioning that one of the most common idols is simply self. We do everything we can to invest in ourselves thinking that we are our best option to save us. We believe that if we can put everything we have into building us to be better we will win. But what if there is a better, healthier investment than self? What if self is too limited?
- The high price of self-soothing idols – Living in a complicated world = human beings have made massive economic markets surrounding self-soothing.
 - Sex
 - Stuff
 - Escapism
 - Substances
 - Food
 - The scariest part – We trade our lives for these things. One of the most precious resources we are frontloaded with is a limited amount of time we will have in this life. Short or long, it's limited. Scarcity increases value. Our life-time is one of our most precious commodities. We invest parts of our lives through time and energy, to acquire them. Time with kids v. work. So, we are practically trading parts of ourselves that we will never get back, for the gain of these items. Some of them are necessary, but it's the ones that may not be that should cause us concern if the trade-off is not healthy or valuable.
 - Do these things work? – Do they get us what we really want? Yes, those things get us a lot of what we are looking for. But here's the thing, I'm not sure they are even as effective as we pretend them to be. If the goal is ultimately a better life, then we need to ask ourselves:
 - Money – Musk or Bezos more fulfilled?
 - Fame – Is Johnny Depp, Tom Cruise or Jennifer Lopez more fulfilled?
 - Power & influence – Donald Trump or Vladimir Putin more fulfilled?
 - Human providers – Melinda Gates and MacKenzie Scott better lives?
 - Stuck living for the wrong things - Do we need breakthrough because we have found ourselves living and striving for things that are ultimately empty? Do we need a new true north in our

life? Do we need grounding in what's important again? Do we need to re-shift our priority list and redesign our goals?

- The foolishness of idolatry - Je 10:11–16 – *“Thus shall you say to them: “The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens.”* ¹² *It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.* ¹³ *When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, and he brings forth the wind from his storehouses.* ¹⁴ *Every man is stupid and without knowledge; every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols, for his images are false, and there is no breath in them.* ¹⁵ *They are worthless, a work of delusion; at the time of their punishment they shall perish.* ¹⁶ *Not like these is he who is the portion of Jacob, for he is the one who formed all things, and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance; the LORD of hosts is his name.”*
- Can your gods save you? - Je 2:28 – *“But where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you, in your time of trouble;...”*
- The Better Way – Living with and for God
 - Why Not God? – IF we believe that God exists, and IF we believe that God is personal and interacts with His creation, then who better to follow and allow to guide us through life?
 - Tracks meaning - what ultimately matters.
 - Knows us best - how we are built = satiate.
 - Defeats sin & death - provided a means to deal with it. destroyed its hold on us.
 - Controls tomorrow - He knows the future & afterlife.
 - Provider - access to all resources.
 - Protector - Almighty & healer.
 - So why do we struggle to follow Him? - One of the challenges of serving a real living God (vs. systems) = We aren't in control. We worry that God won't care about what we care about (if we were honest we want some things we shouldn't).

- What if it's not working? - But what if all of that control will actually fail? What if we don't know what we are doing? What then?

Conclusion

- A call to re-evaluate what we are investing our lives in – The warning of Jeremiah is that God's way is always right and good and when we go our own ways it leads to our destruction. Today can be a day we draw a line in the sand and say thus far I have lived for myself, but from this point forward I will live WITH and FOR my God.
- (shared this in week 3 but it's powerful) - Je 9:23–24 – *“Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches,²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”*