

Henry Ow
Houston Chinese Church
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Sermon Outline

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: I grew up in a family that worshipped idols.
2. Need: Idols represent anything in creation that we love and serve rather than God.
3. Subject: How do we avoid idolizing work?
4. Text: Luke 16:13-15
5. Preview: We'll look at three things in the text this morning. Two drawbacks. One prescription.

BODY

- I. Idolizing work displease God (16:15)
 - A. Work becomes an idol when it becomes our source for significance.
 - B. Work becomes an idol when it becomes a means to get what we want.
 - C. Jesus warns that idolizing anything other than God displeases God (16:15)
 1. Jesus warns the Pharisees that God knows all.
 2. Jesus warns the Pharisees that God finds abominable the things that the world exalts.
 - a. God finds the use of work to build your kingdom abominable because he expects you to build his kingdom.
 - b. God finds the use of work to glorify yourself abominable because only God deserves to be glorified.
- II. Idolizing work causes you to look down on God and not up to Him (16:14)
 - A. The Pharisees looked down on Jesus because they idolized wealth (16:14)
 - B. Idolizing work causes you to look down on God because you think that you no longer need him.
 - C. But work should cause you to look up to God because he gives you the ability to do your work.
- III. Choose to honor God so that you don't idolize work (16:13)
 - A. Jesus teaches that his disciples must choose between devotion to God or devotion to money (16:13)
 1. Jesus uses a series of couplets to emphasize his point.
 2. God requires your unwavering devotion.
 - B. Honoring God changes the way that you view work

1. Honoring God means that you believe that God determines your significance and worth
2. Honoring God means that you see yourself as his servant.

CONCLUSION

1. Summary: Idolizing work leads to misery not happiness. Idolizing work causes you to look down on God not up to Him. Choose to honor God so that you don't idolize work.
2. Closing Image: My mom believed in the gospel because her worship of idols did nothing to help her.

MANUSCRIPT

I grew up in a family that worshipped idols. Let me share with you an annual worship experience of the Ow household. Every September, my family would celebrate the Mid-Autumn festival. The mid-autumn festival coincides with a full moon in the autumn.

On the day of the full moon, my mom would set up three altars. One altar to the idols of different buddhas and deities from Daoism. One altar to my deceased grandparents. One altar outside to the moon. Each of the altars had a bowl to place three joss sticks. A joss stick is a form of incense. My mom would lay out six cups. Three cups for tea. Three cups for rice wine. She would then place fruit and moon cake on each of the altars.

But the altar to the moon was unique. In addition to the cups, fruit, and moon cakes, my mom would lay out three plates of food. A fried fish. An entire poached chicken. A large piece of roast pork.

Once my mom had set up these three altars, she called my brother and I out to pay our respects. We would visit each of these altars beginning with the one to the idols, then the one to the ancestors, and finally outside to the moon. To pay our respect, we would need to take a joss stick and bow three times. After my mom bowed three times, she would mutter a voiceless prayer.

My mom led our family in this type of idol worship every year. Why? She never explained to me explicitly why we did this. But I inferred some things. First, you didn't want to get on the bad side of the idols and our ancestors. We worshipped them so that they

would grant us favor. Second, we worshipped our ancestors, so that we remember who we were. Our Family. But we also worshipped them, so that they would bless us to perpetuate the family line and bless our endeavors.

But idols are not just physical objects that we worship. **Idols represent anything in creation that we love and serve rather than God.** Some people idolize pleasure. This causes them to pursue whatever is pleasurable to them. Fine foods. Thrilling experiences. Visiting exotic locales. Sexual experiences. Some people idolize relationships. This causes them to frequently make friends. They charm. They exhibit magnetism. Some people idolize sports. They feel elated when their team wins. They feel down when their team loses. They shout at the TV when a ref makes a bad call. Idols are not just physical objects like the ones that my family worshipped. But they can also be ideas, beliefs, or lifestyle choices. Anything in creation either material or immaterial can become an idol. As I said earlier, idols represent anything in creation that we love and serve rather than God.

This means that work can also become an idol. As pastor Jason explained last week, work refers more accurately to vocation. Some of us receive pay for our vocation. Engineers. Doctors. Lawyers. Teachers. Mechanics. Some of us don't receive pay for our vocation. Stay at home parent. Student. Retiree. Community Volunteer. Whatever work we do, we might find ourselves loving it and serving it more than God. We live to work.

How do we avoid idolizing work? What can we do to prevent making work something that we worship above God? What can we do to guard our hearts and minds from making work an idol? **How do we avoid idolizing work?**

To answer that question, we'll look at the text that was just read for us. Luke, chapter 16, verse 13 thru 15. Luke is one of the gospels. Matthew. Mark. Luke. Luke. Chapter 16. Verse 13 thru 15.

One unique feature of the gospel of Luke is a travelogue. He includes a large section from chapter 9 to chapter 19 that details Jesus's journey to Jerusalem with his disciples. Some believe that Luke includes this travelogue to describe what it looks like to follow Jesus. Our text occurs in this travelogue.

Now our specific text is sandwiched between two parables. In the first parable, Jesus praises a dishonest manager of his use of resources to build relationships. In the second parable, Jesus describes the fate of a rich man, and a poor man named Lazarus. Since both parables talk about the use of wealth, we should expect wealth to show up also in our section of text.

In our specific section of text, **we'll talk about three things**. First, **we'll reflect on two drawbacks of idolizing work**. Two negative effects. Two flaws. Two weakness. Then **I'll conclude with a prescription of how to avoid idolizing work**. Food for thought. An action step to take. A mentality to adopt so that we avoid idolizing work. Again, the message will have three movements. We'll talk about two drawbacks to idolizing work then I'll conclude with a prescription.

Let's start with the first drawback of idolizing work. Now I know that I have in the outline: Idolizing work leads to misery not happiness. The statement is true. But after some

reflection last night, I don't think it quite captures the idea of the text. I think it would better to say this.

Idolizing work displeases God. Worshipping work does not please God. To put your work before God provokes his anger. Venerating your work exasperates God. **Idolizing work displeases God.**

Let me give you two ways to assess if you have idolized work. Two ideas to reflect upon.

First. **Work becomes an idol when it becomes our source of significance.** I am important because of the work that I do. I have worth because what I do. I derive my identity from my vocation.

Let me show you what this might look like. You prefer to be at work because people praise you for your output. You feel good when you see your name rise to the top of the board of those who made the most monthly sales. You relish the accolades when you receive the employee of the month award. You think that when you dawn that white coat with your embroidered name it makes you significant.

Do you feel crushed when people criticize you at work? It happens often for students. You study hard thinking that you're a good student. But you receive a lower grade than you expect on an exam or a project. It causes you to feel depressed and sad. You begin to question: Do I belong to be at this school? Am I worthless? Do I measure up? When you receive feedback at your end of the year review on areas for you to improve, do you defend yourself because your supervisor fails to see your greatness?

Do you find yourself reflecting on the glory days of when you worked? Maybe you're retired. Whenever you get together with people whether it be family, friend, or even people in church, do you find yourself talking about your past work? Back in my day, when I was in residency, I once went three days without sleep working in the hospital. When I worked at Chevron, I invented multiple ways to improve our refinery output and that was before the invention of computers. Do you find yourself deriving significance from your achievements at work? Do they cause you to stand a little taller?

If you feel these things, then you may have looked to work for significance. You may have used it to measure your worth. You may be idolizing your work.

First means of assessment. Has work become your source of significance? If it has then you may be idolizing work. Second idea to assess if you have made work an idol.

Work becomes an idol when you it becomes means to get what we want. You see work as a tool to achieve a goal. You see work as a lever to pull to accomplish an end.

Allow me to illustrate. You struggle with financial insecurity. This prompts you to put more hours into work. If you work an hourly job, then you look for opportunities to work overtime. You decide to work through holidays. You put in the extra hours of work because you fear not having enough in your bank account. If you work a salaried job, then you put in extra hours at work. You hope that your manager sees your hustle, so that he can put you in for a promotion at the end of the year or award year with a large end of the year bonus. You see work to provide financial security. This causes you to idolize work.

You struggle with acceptance. You desire to be wanted. This causes you to work hard at being at a stay-at-home parent. You read parenting books. You search for parenting blogs. How do you raise intrinsically motivated children? You follow the Instagram accounts of parents to get the latest tips on how to get your kid in to elite schools. Why? You want to parent to your child in such a way that one day your child will say: I love you daddy! I love you mommy! You're the best dad ever. You're the best mom ever. Parenting becomes a means for you to receive acceptance from your children.

Let's review. Two ways for you to evaluate if work has become an idol. First. Do you look to work as a source of significance? Second. Do you look to work as a means to get what you want? If you answer: yes, to either of these questions, then you might be on the path of idolizing work?

Now Jesus issues a warning in our text. **Jesus warns that idolizing anything displeases God.** It provokes his anger.

Look with me at verse 15. *And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God."*

In this verse, Jesus speaks to the Pharisees. He recognizes the motivation of their behavior. They desire others to recognize them as godly people. One might say that they idolized recognition, popularity, acclaim. This causes them to put on a show of how they follow the Mosaic law meticulously. They think that this would ultimately result in the happy

life. This explains why Jesus describes them as “*You are those who justify yourselves before men*”

But Jesus issues two warnings. First warning. **Jesus warns the Pharisees God knows all.** You cannot hide anything from God. No thought. No feeling. No motivation. Look again at the text. *God knows your hearts.* You might be able to fool people. But you can’t fool God. God knows why they act in this way. They don’t worship God. They worship an idol of approval from men.

Jesus issues another warning. **Jesus warns the Pharisees find abominable the things that the world exalts.** Whatever the world praises, God finds it loathsome. Detestable. Look again at verse 15. *For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.* The world may exalt prestige, power, wealth, beauty, and physical prowess. They are idols that the world worships. These idols arouse God’s wrath.

It even includes the idol of work. Let me explain why idolizing work stirs up God’s wrath.

First, **God finds the use of work to build your kingdom abominable because he expects you to build his kingdom.** We idolize work when we use it to build our resume, our wealth, or our networks. It resembles a metaphorical kingdom. But God expects human beings to build his kingdom. Human beings exist as a God’s vice regents to extend God’s rule through the earth not to build our private fiefdoms. This goes against God’s plan and agenda for humanity. It triggers him.

Second, **God find the use of work to glorify yourself abominable because only God deserves to be glorified.** To glorify is to attribute worth to something. We idolize work when we use it attribute worth to ourselves. My high marks make me an honor student. My doctorate degrees, PhD, MD, or JD means you must listen to me. My retirement savings testify to my hard work, my financial wisdom, and stellar stewardship.

Recall the question: What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. If only God deserves the glory, praise, and honor, then we arouse his anger when we say in our hearts or our mouths we deserve the glory, praise, and honor.

The idolization of work displeases God because of two reasons. First, God expects us to build his kingdom not our own through work. Second, God expects us to glorify him through work not ourselves.

First drawback of idolizing work. It displeases God. Let's consider the second drawback of idolizing work. The second negative effect.

Idolizing work causes you to look down on God and not up to Him. Worshipping our vocation causes us to belittle God. A veneration of our work results in us belittling God rather than praising Him. An adoration of work leads to a lack of adoration of God. **Idolizing work causes you to look down on God and not up to Him.**

In this morning's text, we'll see that **the Pharisees looked down on Jesus because they idolized wealth.** Their veneration of wealth caused them to laugh at Jesus. Look at verse 14. *The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.*

The religious leadership in Israel consisted of two groups. The Pharisees and the Sadducees. Of these two groups, the wealthy group was the Sadducees. If that's true, then what does it mean when Luke describes the Pharisees as "lovers of money".

Here's how to explain the description. The Pharisees followed the Mosaic law carefully because they believed that adherence to the law would lead to wealth. If you recall, Moses wrote that if Israel followed the law, then the LORD would bless them. The blessing involved material blessing. Bountiful harvests. Fruitful vines. Numerous children. Protection from enemies. The Pharisees loved what they could potentially get from following the law.

The Pharisees took pride in their ability to follow the law. One could describe it as idolatrous. Since the Pharisees believe in their righteousness in the law, it caused them to look down on Jesus. The text describes the Pharisees ridiculing Jesus. They must have thought: "What does this carpenter from Galilee know about devotion to God? Ha" Their idolization of obeying the law causes them to look down on Jesus. Look down on God.

Just as an idolization of the law caused the Pharisees to look down on God, **the idolization of work causes us to look down on God.** We look down on God because we think that we no longer need Him. Think about it. My work results in paycheck. The paycheck allows me to purchase what I need. I don't need to ask God for help for my daily provision. My excellence at work causes others to recognize me. That's why I'm receiving a promotion at the end of the year. That's why my supervisor tapped me to oversee this million-dollar project. Why do I care if God sees me or not? My study skills, intuition, time

management, and interpersonal skill results in a strong application to college. That's why I got into university. It was all me. Why do I need God? Lack of justice. That's what motivated me to pursue this law degree. With this J.D. in hand, I'm going to create a more just society. I don't need God to dispense justice. I'll do it myself. An idolization of work causes us to dismiss and look down on God.

This is not how vocation works. **Work should cause us to look up to God.** Why? **God gives us the ability to do work.** Consider this. Who enabled you to be born to your family? God. Who gave your parents the wisdom to provide an excellent education to you? God. Who gave you the ability to draw breathe so that you can walk to classes? God. Who ensured that you had the financial means to pay for school? God. Who gave you the mind to process and understand what you learned? God. Who helped you to pass your boards and exams so that you could receive the certifications to do your job? God.

If we consider how God has supplied not only our material needs but everything else, we are, then it should cause us to look up to Him. It should create within us thankfulness. Gratitude. Humility. To look down at God is a dangerous thing.

Second drawback to idolizing work. It causes you to look down on God and not up to him. Let's move on to our last point. The prescription. An application.

Choose to honor God so that you don't idolize work. The key to preventing an idolization of work is a devotion to God. You need to decide that you will utilize your life for God's purposes. You need to conclude in your mind I will do what pleases God with my life. **Choose to honor God so that you don't idolize work.**

We see this in Jesus's instruction to his disciples. **Jesus teaches that his disciples must choose between devotion to God or devotion to money.** They must decide. God or Money.

Look with me at verse 13. *No servant 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.*

Note the couplets in this verse. **Jesus uses a series of couplets to emphasize his point of needing to make a choice.** Hate and love. Devoted and despise. God and money. Jesus uses these contrasts to highlight the idea that you cannot be indecisive. If you choose to serve money, then you cannot serve God. If you choose to serve God, then you cannot serve money.

This then leads us to the conclusion. **God requires your unwavering devotion.** The Greek word behind the English word money is the word: mammon. It's not just referring to currency, but the pursuit of money. For this morning's purposes, we're reflecting on the pursuit of money via work. Now I know some of you don't earn money for your work. This requires you to further abstract the term money up to the concept of either power or influence. The Pharisee desired the influence and power associated with either money or wealth gained through obedience to the law.

An unwavering devotion to God means that everything is subordinated to Him. To honor God requires us to use everything that we have including our work in the way that he desires.

Honoring God changes the way that you view work. You recognize that work cannot ultimately fulfill your need for significance. Why? You will not be able to work forever. If your identity is rooted in work, then what happens when you lose the mental capacity to do your work? What happens if you receive an injury that prevents you from doing the work you used to do? What happens if an illness requires you to change the work you do? Many things can cause you to lose your ability to do work. But if your significance is grounded in your relationship with God through Christ, then you will never lose your sense of worth. Why? God's love for you is unwavering and unchanging. Honoring God means that you believe that God determines your significance and worth.

This idea frees you to do your work well. Imagine working for NASA. A floor line supervisor reports to you that he just discovered that one of his workers had been using the wrong sealant to seal the panels of a space capsule. You know that if you report this error, then it will set the launch of the capsule back for weeks maybe months. It also means the project will go overbudget. You imagine in your mind the news articles that will be published about NASA. A failure to report it could result in catastrophic failure of the capsule and possibly loss of life. Your belief in the gospel that God who took care of your sin will also take care of you enables you to report the error.

Honoring God means that you see yourself as his servant. You utilize your gifts and abilities at work to bring about flourishing in your workplace. Stay at home parents create spaces where their kids can grow in wisdom so that they can contribute to their families. Retirees utilize their time and resources to equip the next generation for the work

of God. Students approach their studies with diligence so that their knowledge will enable them to contribute to the well-being of others.

To summarize this morning's message. Two drawbacks to idolizing work. First. Idolizing work displeases God. Second. Idolizing work causes you to look down on God and not up to him. A prescription. Choose to honor God so that you don't idolize work.

Let me conclude by returning to my family's worship of idols. Years ago, I remember returning home I overheard my mom talking with a friend on the phone. She told her friend that she had removed all her idols and altars. I didn't believe what I was hearing. So I crept into our living room and looked up to where the altar to my grandparents should have been. It was gone. I went to the den where the idols resided. Put away. I thought to myself: what is going on. Curious, this prompted me to eavesdrop on my mom's chat to see if she would explain why she removed the idols. Eventually she shared that she had removed the idols because they never did anything good for her. She worshipped those idols all these years, but she lost my dad to cancer. She lost her job. Truth. **My mom believed in the gospel because the worship of idols or ancestors did nothing to help her.** Idolizing work will never do anything good for us. Only honoring God has benefits.