

Lenten Devotional 2020

Thursday, March 19, 2020
Day 20, Exodus 20

Careful What You Make

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites this: ‘You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven: Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold. (Exodus 20:22–23)

If I asked you what Moses looked like, what would you answer? How about Aaron? Miriam? Besides being able to affirm their Jewish ethnicity, we wouldn't actually be able to give a physical description. That is because the Bible doesn't give (generally) physical descriptions of people. This is another way to avoid making graven images. Remember, words are symbols and symbols construct meaning.

This whole chapter emphasizes the uniqueness of God and the responsibility of God's people to worship him alone. It is embedded in the ten words, repeated in the quote above, and even the altar cannot be chiseled—even that could become an object of worship.

It reminds me of something C. S. Lewis has said while speaking about prayer. We have to be careful that we don't actually pray to the God that we picture in our minds. That too can become an idol. Rather, we must pray to God as he knows himself to be. Yes, even our own minds can be an idol factory.

Of course, this has to be emphasized so much because human beings are idolatrous in nature. Our penchant is to worship and rely on things other than God. Thomas Long notes that Israel often gravitated to worship of Baal rather than YHWH because Baal offered more guarantee of response. Which brings us to the heart of idolatry; control. We want to control the circumstances of our lives. So we look for powers outside of ourselves (because we learn quickly we cannot control the circumstances of our lives) of which to take control. So, when God reveals himself he leaves us no room to control him. He remains firmly over us and rather than control he offers us relationship; he says trust me.

We must be aware of our own inclinations to make idols in order to make meaning and have control over our lives. This is why all of our sin lives revolve around four traditional areas: wealth, power, sexuality, and spirituality. Sin is not just violating a rule God spoke or wrote down. Sin is making something other than God our god. Sin is looking to our bank account to make us secure. Sin is trying to conform the world around us to our image. Sin is trying to reduce myself and others into objects of pleasure and self-fulfillment. Sin is trying to find religious meaning apart for Christ.

God alone is worthy of our worship. God alone can give us meaning. We cannot control our circumstances and we certainly cannot control God. However, we can put our trust in God, knowing that all other things are idols trying to usurp God and steal our humanity. God alone is the one who raised Jesus from the dead having first raised Israel from Egypt. He alone bears self-description.

Prayer

God almighty, maker of heaven and earth, thank you for imaging us. Thank you that we bear your image. Forgive us for making gods of things and putting them in your place. Help us to let these images go and to put our trust in you. Amen.