



RIVERS OF LIVING WATER

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Little children, keep yourselves from idols

What is an idol? An idol is a false image, something that is not real. It is something that people value and adore and even worship. It may be a physical image that has been made by human hands. But it is false; it is not the real thing. In the book of Isaiah, God states He is the only real God, and then He describes the making of an idol. The idol is something formed and fashioned by human hands. It may look beautiful, but it is of absolutely no value, because it is not real. In fact the idol is a lie.

*Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. **Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.**⁹ They that make a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed.¹⁰ **Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing?**¹¹ Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they are of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together.¹² The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms: yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth: he drinketh no water, and is faint.¹³ The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house.¹⁴ He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it.¹⁵ Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto.¹⁶ He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire.¹⁷ And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god.¹⁸ They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand.¹⁹ And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree?²⁰ He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, **Is there not a lie in my right hand?** (Isaiah 44:20 KJV)*

This describes how a man cuts down a tree, and uses some of the wood to make a fire to cook his food, and uses the rest of the wood to make an idol which he then worships! It shows how the man doesn't even realize that this idol is made from wood; it cannot do anything for him.

But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.⁴ Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.⁵ They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not:

*⁶ They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not:⁷ They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.⁸ **They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.**⁹ O Israel, **trust thou in the LORD:** he is their help and their shield. (Psalm 115:3-9 KJV)*

**Is there a God
beside me?
Yea, there is
no God; I
know not
any.**

These idols are made with men's hands. They cannot speak, see, hear, smell, use their hands, or walk. They are false. But amazingly, people make them and worship them! We should trust in and worship the real God, not the false ones.

God has made clear in His word that we are not to have idols. We are not to have any other "gods" before him. *Thou shalt have none other gods before me.⁸ Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth:⁹ Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God (Deuteronomy 5:7-9 KJV)*

Of course there are people in many countries including Honduras who do bow down to statues, to idols made of wood or stone or metal. They value and adore and even worship these false images. They don't ask themselves this question, "Is this not a lie in my right hand?" They don't realize, "This is false! It cannot help me!"

Maybe you are saying to yourself, "Ah, that's OK, because I do not have any false images. I do not have any idols in my house. I would never trust in a false image like that"

It is true that false images made of wood and stone and metal are idols. But there are other types of false images and idols. There may be things or people in our lives that we value more than we value God. These have become idols for us.

But there is another kind of idol that I want to talk about today.

Sometimes in our mind and heart we create a false image of who God is. The image is not real. It does not line up with who God says He is in His word. But we trust in this false image. We love the false image. And we convince ourselves that the false image is real. This false image does not sit on our shelf or on a table in our house. But it sits in our mind and our heart. We have this false idea of who God is, and the when we read the Bible, we look for everything we can find that will justify and agree with the false image we have of God. And we ignore the parts that seem to contradict our image of God, who we think God should be. We may even find teachers who believe in the same false image and encourage us to keep trusting in it.

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. (2 Timothy 4:3-4 NIV)

Paul is talking here about teachers who do not preach the real God, they preach what people want to hear about God, they preach a false image of God, they preach an idol. And the people love to listen to these teachers, because they tell them what they want to hear.

For example, some people like to think that God is a doting grandfather in the sky, a kind of heavenly Father Christmas who never will let anything bad happen to us and who exists for our pleasure and exists primarily in order to bless us. Many people preach this lie. This is a false image. It is an idol. It is not who God is. These people struggle when they are presented with the fact that while God loves us, He does make demands on our lives and He does require that we live in a certain way.

Other people like to think that God is a harsh, angry tyrant who hovers over us just waiting for us to fail in any small way so that then He can punish us. Many churches preach this kind of god. This is a false image. It is an idol. It is not who God is. These people struggle when they are presented with the fact that while God does make demands on our lives and corrects us in His love when we fail, we are His Bride whom He loves deeply and He nourishes and cherishes us with deep affection.

In our hearts and minds, we all have our own ideas about who God is, or even ideas about who we think God should be. Many times these ideas become idols. They become false images. We fashion them from our own thoughts and desires and ideas. These idols may seem beautiful and logical and real. But they are false. And we struggle or even become offended or angry when our idols are challenged. Some people stop following God when they realize that He is not who they thought He was.

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The Bible says we are made in God's image. It tells us to make no false images. But many times we want to make God in our own image. We would like God to be a certain way, and so we tell ourselves that that is who He is. We make an idol in our minds and hearts. And when God starts to show us more of who He really is, we want to protect our ideas of who He is, even when those ideas are false or wrong. We want to protect our idols.

We have been talking these last two weeks about getting to know Jesus Christ. Paul said in Philippians 3, *"I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord"* (Philippians 3:8 KJV) Are we willing like Paul to lose those idols and seek the real Jesus? Or do we want to hold onto our own ideas of who he is, our idols and our false images? Do we want to know who Jesus really is?

God says that if we really want to know him, we must seek Him with our whole heart. *And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.* (Jeremiah 29:33 KJV)

Seeking God with our whole heart means we must be willing to let go of our wrong ideas of who God is, willing to destroy our idols and instead really know Jesus Christ, know who He really is. The question this morning is, do we want to know Him, or would we rather just keep our idols, keep our own ideas of who He is? Do we want to be in love with our idols, be in love with our ideas of who He is? Do we want to make God in our own image? Or do we want to know Him for who He really is? Even when that is not comfortable?

Many things in life are unexplained. Many times we do not understand God. We encounter many problems and difficulties. In the middle of all of this, are we going to say in our hearts, "Jesus, more than anything else, I want to know you?" Whatever it takes, whatever it costs, are we like the apostle Paul going to pursue the knowledge of Jesus Christ? Not information about him, but rather a relationship with him?

When people from religions that practice idol worship come to Christ, many times they have little idols in their houses and they know once they have come to Christ that they must destroy those little idols. In the same way, now that we have come to Christ we may have to let go of some of the ideas we have had about God. Those false images in our minds and hearts

We **can** know Jesus and this is the choice before us. To cling onto our idols because they seem to make our life more explainable or more comfortable, or to pursue the knowledge of Jesus Christ. We can say, "God, I already have my ideas of who I think you are or who I think you should be. I would rather believe in my images than pursue the truth" Or we can say, "God, I want to know you, whatever that involves and whatever that means, I want to know the real you."

What is eternal life?

Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. (John 17:3 NIV)

If you are born again, you **can** know the only true God, and you **can** know Jesus Christ who he sent. How can you know Him? By seeking Him with your whole heart. "God, I want to know You. Whatever it takes, I want to know you. More than anything else in this life, I want to know You."

The great news is God has opened His heart to us through Jesus Christ- so we CAN truly know Him.

And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. ²¹ *Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.* (1 John 5:20-21 KJV)

So, little children, keep yourselves from idols. Do you want to know Jesus Christ this morning? Do you want to know Him for who He really is? Ask God to show you the false images and idols you may have in your minds and heart. Be willing to let go of those images. Let's press forward towards the goal of the high and excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Do we want to make God in our own image? Or do we want to know Him for who He really is?