

KNOWING THE REAL AND INVISIBLE GOD Exodus 20:4-6

Good morning! We're on the second part of our series we're calling "Living a Fulfilled Life". In this series, we're looking at the 10 Commandments and their implications in our lives today. As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, the 10 commandments were given by God, first, to make us aware of our sinful nature and, therefore, point us to Jesus, and second, to regulate our relationships. The first four are about our relationship to God and the next six are about our relationship to others.

The first commandment is the first step toward living a fulfilled life. Because you cannot truly find fulfillment unless you acknowledge that God is first in everything in your life. As a recap, in which areas of our lives should God be first? Think of the acronym FIRST. Finances, Interests, Relationships, Schedule, and Tithes. Oops, it's actually Trouble. Tithes is in finances. Just a reminder.

Today, we're looking at the second step toward living a fulfilled life. It's entitled "Knowing the Real and Invisible God". Let's read these verses together from Exodus 20:4-6.

Now the principle of this passage, Step two to a fulfilled life, is that things are to be used, not loved. Things are to be used, not loved. You know in the past idols were made of stone and brick and metal and in Moses' day they had an idol for everything. In fact, when God was giving this commandment, they were at the bottom of the hill making a golden calf.

It's interesting that in Old Testament times there were two great idols. One was named Chemosh, the god of violence and the other was Baal, the god of sex. It sounds like modern day TV shows. And what they idolized in those days, sex and violence, we idolize today, we pay money to go see.

Now it's obvious God prohibited the Israelites to make idols to represent him because he cannot be represented by images or icons or what-not. The pagans didn't know the real God and, in their ignorance, created all these idols. But God is invisible and, therefore, we don't know how he really looks like. Besides, he is Spirit and how do you represent a Spirit? Of course, he came down in the person of the Lord Jesus and we have many drawings of Jesus but they are not meant to be worshiped. They are not meant for you to bow down before them and even to kiss them.

I remember a story my mom told me years ago which her aunt who was living in another part of California told her. She said one time there was a powerful earthquake in California. The walls of the house started to shake, so my mom's aunt who panicked rushed out of her bedroom. On her way to the living room, she quickly grabbed a swaying picture on the wall and held it close to her chest muttering, "Apo Dyos, Apos Dyos", "Lord God, Lord God" and asked God to save her. She was really hugging it tight, crying, even kissing it now and then. Until the shaking stopped. She heaved a sigh of relief, wiped the tears from her eyes and looked at the picture to thank God. To her utter surprise, it was not the picture of Jesus but the picture of her daughter. So, she thanked her daughter. Just kidding.

The principle here is that we must not put our faith on things that can be seen but on things unseen. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29)

Now, what are the things we idolize? Lots of things. We idolize wealth, we idolize food, we idolize pleasure, we idolize power, we idolize physical beauty. There's a lot of body worship today, you know. And how do I look is a predominant obsession in life. We idolize beauty. Ephesians 5:5 (CEV) says, "Being greedy, indecent, or immoral is just another way of worshiping idols." What this verse is talking about is don't turn things into a god. Paul is explaining

that idolatry is not just worshipping literal idols. It's also worshipping any thing that turns your heart away from God. That's commonly called materialism.

What happens when we turn things into gods? Well there are **three things that happen when we turn things into god.** Now, if you notice, in verses 5 and 6, our text mentions a curse and a blessing if you worship idols. Let's look at the principles involved here. First, at the curses.

Number one, things will disappoint you. They disappoint you. They will let you down. **Jeremiah 10:14, "Everyone is senseless and without knowledge; every goldsmith is shamed by his idols. The images he makes are a fraud; they have no breath in them."** It's saying here that those who make idols are embarrassed by their idols because they can't deliver what they promise. How many of you have ever been disappointed by something that you bought? How many of you have you ever ordered something online and it wasn't anything like you ordered? Maybe it was too small or too big or not the color that you actually wanted. But it looks like the real thing in the advertisement.

Things will disappoint you. So, we go out and we buy all these things and get in debt. One guy said I may not be outstanding, but my bills are. Things will disappoint you. When I get a bigger house then I'll be happy. When I get a Tesla, then I'll have it made. When I buy this new object, then I'll be satisfied. When and then. You're asking to be disappointed. You're making it an idol in your life. Jeremiah says don't take anything and turn it into a god. Don't make it something that you look to for satisfaction because you'll have a real let down.

You see, you cannot purchase happiness. And things will disappoint when you expect them to solve your problems. If you're having marriage problems, maybe if we get a different spouse, maybe that will solve our problems. Things do not solve problems. They will disappoint you. **Habakkuk 2:18 says, "What benefit is a carved image when its maker has carved it?"** You know the answer.

Not only will things disappoint, things will deceive you. They will lead you astray. In Ezekiel 14:3, God says, “*These men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces*”. It's not important what idols are in your home, it's the idols in your heart. They have given their hearts to idols and they are letting them lead them into sin. Things will deceive you if you let them. They're a trap. The thing is if you idolize something in life they will deceive you. How many of you know of a person that the lure of a promotion will compromise their standards? How many people do you know who have been promised fame have lowered their values? How many people do you know have thrown away their integrity because of profit as motivation? When anything becomes more important than God in your life, it's going to lure you into the wrong way. And if you give up everything or things become all important in your life then you will give up other things that are important values, family, relationships, for these things. The Cracker Jack slogan I remember years back said, “The more you eat, the more you want.” And that's true. Things will disappoint you and things will deceive you and they'll lead you astray.

And then Number 3, things will dominate you. They will dominate you if you let them. They will control you. And they will change you. What's wrong with idols? What's wrong with loving things? Well, he says don't love or bow down or worship or be devoted to any created things. Because they will dominate you. The psalmist says, “*Those who make them (referring to idols) will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.*” (Psalm 115:8)

You will be like idols if you make idols. Idols don't feel, they don't see, they don't hear, they're callous. Because they're just things, they're lifeless, inanimate. Would you like to be someone like that – someone who doesn't care about people – conscienceless and compassion-less, unkind and maybe even brutish? For example, those who idolize wealth, will cheat and be cruel to people on their way up in the

corporate ladder. Those who idolize fame will bully others in order to be at the forefront of any endeavor. Those who idolize sex or sensuality will disregard a notice on the internet that says, “Enter at your own risk. You will see pictures of obscene nature”. You’ve become an idol that don’t see. In fact, that’s what the preceding verses in Psalm 115:5-7 say, “They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell. They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats.”

One day a man came to Jesus and asked, “What can I do to have eternal life?” And Jesus knew that the hot button in this guy's life was things, he was very wealthy. And he said if you want to follow me go sell everything you have and come and follow me. Jesus said that to the guy because that was his stumbling block. It's not because wealth is wrong, it's not. A lot of people in the Bible were wealthy. But when it becomes an idol, it's wrong. He said go sell it and then go follow me. And then it says the young man walked away sad.

Now let me ask you. I want you to think of the most prized possession that you have. Think of the most prized possession you have and then if God told you to give it away, could you? Would you, if he told you to give it away? You see that's the test of idolatry. If you're not willing to give it away, you don't own it, owns you. Things can tend to dominate our lives.

You see, that's what is so good about giving. Every time you give, it is a victory over idolatry. It's giving away. It's holding things lightly. Isn't it amazing how big a dollar bill is when you give at church and how little it looks when you get in the grocery line? Have you noticed that?

So, let me repeat. What’s an idol? Anything I love more than God. And the principle? Things are to be used not loved. Why? Because when we love them we're disappointed, they deceive us, they dominate us.

The point of the 2nd commandment is this. Things make a poor god.

And when we idolize anything else it prevents us from knowing who we are and our God. So what is God really like? What is the real God? How do you imagine God? I mean what do you think of when I say God? What do you imagine? In the Bible, **Genesis 1:26**, God says, *“Let us make man in our image.”* And nowadays, we're doing the opposite. We're saying let us make God in our image. We're reversing it.

Our society lets us create new images of God. I saw an article in Psychology Today magazine, June 1985, and it says, **“Despite the claims that we have become immoral and godless, 95 percent of all people in this study said, “I believe in God.”**” What has changed, according to sociologist Wayne Clashing, are people's images of God, not their affirmation. They ask the people, what do you think about God? How likely are you to think of him in these images? And they gave people several choices. The images that people have of God today are totally different than what the Bible says. So, they ask, What's God really like? Some people think that God is George Burns in tennis shoes. A feeble little man who's a lot of fun and he's your buddy, buddy, but he can't do too much to help you solve your problems. Lay back attitude toward the world. Some people think of God as a cosmic policeman sitting up in the sky with binoculars waiting to catch you having fun. And if you make one little mistake you've blown it and your life is going to be a bummer the rest of your life. Some people imagine a God who is some harsh general. Barking out laws and commands. So, what is God really like? That's what this verse is all about.

Two weeks ago, the first principle in living the fulfilled life, God gets first place in my life. This is a natural extension of it. What is God really like? He said he's not a thing. He can't be contained in a thing. Look at what **Isaiah 40**

says, *“With whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you liken him?”* That's a good question. What do you imagine when I say God?

What do you think of? What do you compare God to? The answer to that question in the Old Testament is found in the New Testament Acts 17:29, read that verse with me. *“Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill.”* He says nothing can represent God because he's too great and you can't put him in those terms. No object or thing can represent him. You see if I can understand everything there is about God, and I could represent him in an image, he wouldn't be smarter than I was. I would be as smart as God. Why have a god if I can understand everything about him? So how do you imagine God? That's a good question that Isaiah brings up.

So, what is God really like? How does God want us to imagine him? When we look at these verses, first in **2 Corinthians 4:4**, it says, *“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”* And second in **Colossians 1:15**, *“The Son is the image of the invisible God.”*, we see clearly that there's a perfect picture of God, his name is Jesus Christ. God came to earth in the form of a human being so we wouldn't have to make little idols and wonder what he's all alike. And it is written down in the Bible so we can focus. You want to know what God is like, he's like Jesus. You want to know what God's like? Take a long look at Jesus. He is the exact image of God. That's why he came to earth, for God could show himself to us.

Now, we come to the benefits of worshipping the real God in the person of Jesus. Let's look at the principles we can glean from verse 6. There are **three** **benefits of worshipping the real God.**

Number 1, Fulfillment.

Fulfillment. **Romans 10:11 says, “As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.”** Folks that's a guarantee from God.

And what is he saying? He's saying I will fulfill your life. In contrast, how many of you have found that the fulfillment of things doesn't last too long? It doesn't. It's like, you know, you've got a new shiny phone, but after a few months, you say it's too small, and so you get a bigger one to watch videos. And then, you notice it doesn't take great pictures and so you get a bigger one with not two, not three, but four camera lenses. And after a few months, you realize you'd be more productive with a phone that is folding like this so you can watch video and text at the same time. But folks, I got this at a bargain price. It's a third of the actual price. When everybody else has moved on to version 2, I got version 1. I'm a cheapskate. Ask my wife.

It just keeps going and going and going. The fulfillment doesn't last. But God says whoever believes in me will never be disappointed. Look at this verse in The Good News translation. **Psalm 34:7, “Keep your happiness in the Lord and he will give you your heart's desires.”** Isn't that a great verse? Keep your happiness or delight yourself as other version says, not in things, but in the Lord. And he will give you your heart's desires. That's a guarantee. He's saying I will fulfill your life.

Number 2, God will give you freedom.

Freedom. Rather than being dominated by things, when we give ourselves to the control of God we find freedom. Jesus says, **“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”** (John 8:31-32) The truth he is speaking of here is not general truth, but He himself because he says “I am the Truth” in John 14:6. And what does Jesus set us free from? From sin and its consequences. You see, if you have Jesus, you have the Holy Spirit in you. And the Holy Spirit is the agent by which we get our

freedom. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 3:17, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

So, Jesus talks of the freedom of a clear conscience. He offers the freedom of a purposeful life. He offers the freedom of a future you can hope for. Worldly things do not give you freedom. In fact, the more things you have the less freedom you have. Have you ever tried to move? The more things you collect the less freedom you have, folks. Things don't give freedom, God gives freedom. You experience fulfillment, you'll experience freedom when you worship the true God. Which brings us to the next point.

And Number 3, you become like Jesus.

You become like Jesus. Because of the freedom Jesus gives us, we are being changed to become like him. So, in the next verse, **2 Corinthians 3:18**, it says “*And we all...are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*” I like how The Living Bible puts it, “**And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him.**”

(TLB)

Folks, there's a law of life and let me just summarize what this commandment is all about in this sentence. You will become like whatever you worship. You will become like whatever you love. You will become like whatever you are devoted to. So, choose your God wisely and don't create a god out of something that isn't even as significant as you are, a thing. Whether it is your reputation, fame, or sex, or to be the top of your business, or whatever, don't idolize it. It says whatever you focus on, you're going to become like. God's plan is that you become like him, not a god, but godly. From the very beginning when God made man, he said “Let us make man in our own image”. God's plan has never changed. He's still saying I want to make you in my image. So don't start making me in your image.

Now let's just wrap this up.

Jesus said a man's life does not consist in the abundance of things that he possesses. When your entire life centers around decorating your home or polishing your home or making the sale or tennis lessons it's becoming an idol. Do you have any idols in your home? Objects you think represent God and you look at it and focus your eyes on it and even face it when you pray? I say you better get rid of it. More importantly don't allow idols in your life or in your heart.

So, step two to a fulfilled life is pretty simple. Things are to be used, not loved. When we use things and love God you got the correct perspective. But if you start loving things you're going to get it reversed and you're going to start using God or using people to get things. Things can never bring fulfillment, freedom, satisfaction, but God can.

He can because he has given you Jesus Christ, his own Son. The Bible says, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)**

All you need to do is to acknowledge that only Jesus can set you free. Some of you are still slave to sin or slave to your idols. That idol can be your money, your health, your relationships, your career, your habit, your possessions, or even yourself. As a result, these things dominate your lives and they have become your end-all and be-all. In the process you have hurt yourself and others to be ahead of the game so to speak. You know it's wrong, you've been guilty of things you've done wrong. And you want to be set free. Give your heart to Jesus this morning and you will be set free. Idols are nothing. Jesus is everything. Believe he died for you on the cross, he was buried, and rose from the dead. If you do that, God will forgive your sins and give you eternal life. There's nothing more fulfilling than putting God first in your life and making him alone your God.

Would you that this morning?