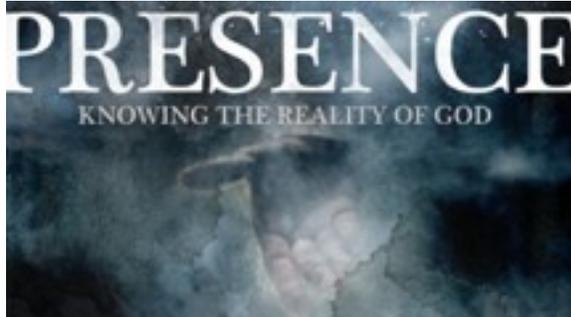


## **“Devotion”**

### **Exodus 20:1-5 Presence #3**

**February 16-17, 2019**



#### **Main Thought:**

**“Idolatry starts in the heart: craving, wanting, enjoying, being satisfied by anything that you treasure more than God.”**

To explore this idea, let us look at a passage in Colossians 3 that gives us a working definition of idolatry. Look at these words... **“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these, the wrath of God is coming.”** (Colossians 3:5–6)

Why are idols dangerous? Namely, the wrath of God is coming upon idolatry. Nothing is more dangerous than the wrath of an omnipotent, all-righteous God. And Paul says the wrath of God is coming on idolatry. Now why would that be? Listen to **Exodus 20: “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness or anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God.”** (Exodus 20:4–5)

The wrath of God comes on the idolater because God is jealous. There is a righteous and holy jealousy and an unrighteous and weak and insecure jealousy. And God’s jealousy is not only righteous — that is, he deserves our deepest and strongest affections and admiration — but it is loving.

It is a loving jealousy, because we were made to find our greatest joy when he is our greatest treasure. He is jealous that he be honored by being treasured, and he is jealous that we be satisfied by treasuring him. So, he is jealous in a loving way and he is jealous in a righteous way. And if we find God to be so boring or so negligible that we must put other things in his place that really satisfy us more than he does, then we not only offend him, but we also destroy ourselves. Those two things make God angry. He doesn’t want to be offended and he doesn’t want us to destroy ourselves. Idolatry contradicts both of those things and so his wrath comes upon the idolater. So that is the answer to the first question: Why it is so dangerous?

#### **What is an idol and what does it look like today?**

Paul says, “Covetousness, which is idolatry.” So what idolatry looks like today is the activity of the human heart. This is not a deed of the body. That follows — a fruit on a branch. It starts in the heart: craving, wanting, enjoying, being satisfied by anything that you treasure more than God. That is an idol. Paul calls this covetousness — a disordered love or desire, loving more than God what ought to be loved less than God and only for the sake of God. But covetousness is the condition that this disordered heart is in, an act of loving too much what ought to be loved less. And that is why the wrath of God is coming. That is what idolatry looks like today. And it is everywhere in our culture.

What is an idol? Well, it is the thing. It is the thing loved or the person loved more than God, wanted more than God, desired more than God, treasured more than God, enjoyed more than God. It could be a girlfriend. It could be good grades. It could be the approval of other people. It could be success in business. It could be sexual stimulation. It could be a hobby or a musical group that you are following or a sport or your immaculate yard. I was looking for some yard stuff the other day and I clicked on a video ad for a yard service and three people came on and all of them made the point that this yard service enabled them to brag that they had the best yard in the neighborhood. I thought: What a motivation! I want to be number one in green grass! So that could be an idol. Or your own looks could be an idol. It could be anything.

**“Idolatry starts in the heart: craving, wanting, enjoying, being satisfied by anything that you treasure more than God.”**

Paul puts it like this in **Romans 1:25**: **“They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature” — anything that is created — “rather than the Creator.”** But there is no wrath for the children of God. And why is that? Because Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 1: **“You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”** (1 Thessalonians 1:9–10)

### **Idolatry is the mother of all sins**

Breaking this commandment of having no other Gods is what causes us to break all of the others. Listen...idolatry causes you to be blind to how much you break the others. (They say that a drug addict or a sex addict gets so driven by their addiction that they are just oblivious to how much they are hurting and exploiting others, in the same way); Idolatry keeps you blind to how much you are breaking the other commandments! You rationalize your disobedience...a woman leaves her husband and tells me, “God wants me to be happy so He’s ok with me breaking some of His laws because I’m sure deep down He wants me to be happy.” What she really means is, “I need my idol so bad that I refuse to let God get in the way. And if He does try to get in the way I’ll crucify Him by redefining Him.”

### **Idolatry is slavery**

You serve an idol because you need something from it, and every idol gives you promises and threats: it promises blessings if you obey; and threatens you with curses you if you fail.

The god of beauty says, “Find me, and you’ll be happy; miss me, and I’ll make you miserable.” So, you strive and strive to get beauty! Same is true for money, the god of success...This is where we become slaves. We look to them...but they never deliver. If anything, they put you in a constant cycle of satisfaction and despair...always promising you happiness is right around the corner...or driving you to despair because you can’t ever seem to get it.

That’s why the worship of God is the gateway to freedom: Jehovah is the only God who, if you find Him, will satisfy you, and if you fail Him, will forgive you. Some of you have striven all your life to have someone approve of you! When people are happy with you, you feel great; or when you feel successful you are confident and proud; but when you are not you are insecure and in despair and jealous and vengeful. You are a slave, always trying to prove yourself to somebody. What God is telling Israel here is “You have MY approval. You are my treasured, precious possession. I have saved you and made you mine.” People, with that, I mean, what else is there? They have the absolute approval and acceptance of the only one whose opinion really matters!

The same is true for us in Christ. Jesus has saved us, and in Him we have the God who created the sun and the stars and the molecules...we have His approval! Whose approval do I need if I have His? What other securities do I need...money, prosperity...if I am held securely by Him?

### **How can we escape the slavery of idolatry?**

Some of you are like, “You got me. I’m an idolater.” Where is the support group...Idolaters R Us...How do you escape it? This is very important, and surprising even. Did you see what comes right before this command?

And God spoke all these words: ***“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery... Exodus 20:1-2***

I have already redeemed you. It's not that I'm going to save you as a reward for loving Me...it's that you love me in response to the love and salvation I have already given to you. Every other religion in the world teaches you that if you love God enough, He'll love you back. God turns that on its head here, and says, "I love you first. I have purchased, accepted you...saved you, now dwell on that, think about that, BELIEVE that...and then love me in response to salvation, not in pursuit of salvation."

You see, we can't just work up love for God. Because we'd always be trying to prove ourselves to Him. (Is it enough?) We love Him in response to His extravagant love for us. That was for Israel; it's also the offer of salvation to us. God has already purchased our salvation in Jesus' work on the cross. It's all done. And if we would just see that, embrace it, believe that...if we would ever just get our minds around the immensity of the love that God showed us at the cross, and we just stood in awe of the magnitude of compassion shown for us there, it would move our heart to such passion for Him.

He is the Father who has loved you and never left you and always believed in you and kept coming for you. You could not ask for a better friend, or a more compassionate King. Now, just respond! So, here's your question: Are you going to let Him be your God or not? Are you going to receive His salvation? Who are you going to serve?

In C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the white witch holds the land under a spell, called an enchantment. But the enchantment is broken, and for a time, people can escape the spell of the god. They have a choice: the spell is broken, and if you want to choose to go free, you can.

That's what has happened at the Exodus. God has freed them.

For many of you, that has happened. The god you have served has let you down. And now you have an opportunity to come to the real God. You have to choose, "Which is the real God?" Who do you want to build your life on? Who do you trust? Who do you think can satisfy you?

And God gives you the same offer He gives to Israel:

- Repent of your idols
- Receive my salvation

Surrender to Jesus as Lord. Receive His offer to save you! He's not saying, Come clean up your life. Get rid of all your junk and your dirty magazines...that will come in time. He's saying, come and receive me as your God. Learn of my love for you, and I'll change you. Are you ready to enter into this covenant of embracing this God as God and Savior?

### **Potential Questions For Life Groups**

1. Look at Exodus 20:1-2: Why is God so intent on having no other gods but the Lord God? What does it mean for God to be a jealous God?
2. What is the definition of idolatry? How has idolatry affected your daily life as well as your spiritual life?
3. The testimony of Scripture is that God alone is worthy of worship. Idol worship robs God of the glory that is rightfully His, and that is something He will not tolerate (Isaiah 42:8). What are some of the other gods we bow down to and rob God of the glory that is only meant for him?
4. God wants our full devotion. What does it mean to you for you to be a fully devoted follower of Christ? How are you doing as you pursue that goal?