

High and Exalted (12): No Other Gods

(Isaiah 44:6-22)

I. Introduction

- A. Chris Cornell of Soundgarden wrote an unusual song I want to spin off of
1. Cornell was flipping channels and came across a TV prosperity preacher
 - a. Man's message was "*Sends me money, God will bless you with favor*"
 - b. Cornell was far from a religious man, but this struck him as idolatry
 - c. He got mad and did what songwriters do— wrote song *Wooden Jesus*
Wooden Jesus, where are you from? Korea or Canada or maybe Taiwan
I didn't know it was the Holy Land; but I believed the minute the check left my hand
And I pray, can I be saved? I spent all my money on a future grave
Wooden Jesus, I'll cut you in on twenty percent of my future sin. I'll cut you in
 2. Idolatry. It is condemned 300+ times in Bible, more than any other sin
 - a. Ten Commandments begin "*no other gods*" and "*make no image*"
 - b. That is **Exodus 20**? When does Israel first break those two? **Exodus 32**
 - c. **Exodus 32** is also the 1st time God threatens to punish Israel over idols!
- B. *Why are idols so bad?* Why is God so "jealous" (*His words*) over our idols?
1. Let me answer with a question, "*Why couldn't Israel leave idols alone?*"
 - a. Here a pop quiz— Which Bible book am I summarizing for you here
Israel worships idols. Suffers defeat. Suffers. Repents. Led to freedom. Rinse and repeat
 - b. Judges. Also accept Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. Prophets. OT
 2. Why? Two facts about Baal and Asherah explain why Israel keeps returning
 - a. **First**, they were fertility gods who promised added wealth and prosperity
 - 1) Baal made your field and flocks fertile & caused wives to have babies
 - 2) In an agrarian culture where fertility was everything, that had appeal
 - b. **Second**, Baals were connected to certain land areas ("*Baal of Peor*")
 - 1) Aram wanted to fight Israel on level ground (*God is God of mountain*)
 - 2) If Baal was connected to your land, you didn't want him in bad mood
 3. Idolatry is when we make God less than He is so that He can be controlled
 - a. That's what Cornell was getting at in his song about *Wooden Jesus*
 - 1) It's idolatrous to think God must respond to a donation or good deed
 - 2) It's idolatry to think any blessing can be claimed "*in Jesus name*"
 - 3) It's idolatry to think God can be manipulated to fit our ideas or whims
 - b. When Christianity reduces God to this level, then it becomes idolatry

- C. We continue our study of Isaiah we've called "*High and Exalted*" in **Isaiah 44**
1. This is Isaiah's clearest condemnation of Judah's fascination with idols
 - a. No one will ever ask Isaiah after this, "So, what do you think about idols"
 - b. He says clearly, cuttingly, "Idols are stupid; worship them and so are you"
 2. We need to keep in mind here that Isaiah is preaching to two audiences—
 - a. He is writing during a time when Judah was still fascinated with idols
 - 1) Hezekiah tore them down, but Manasseh built them all back up & more
 - 2) Jewish tradition says Isaiah was martyred while opposing Manasseh
 - b. Here in the book he is looking forward to a Judah already in captivity
 - 1) He points confused, restless and discouraged people where to look
 - 2) They must not trust the things that will fail them but wait for God
 - c. Let's quickly survey this section of the book and see what God says to us

II. No Other Gods

- A. **First**, Isaiah reminds us that only God is God; there are no other gods (**44:6-8**)
1. God is the first and last; make a list of all gods, and God is the only one on it
 - a. God's first word on Sinai is the foundation of His covenant (**Exo 20:2-3**)
 - 1) Jewish way of counting the Ten Commandment doesn't start here
 - 2) This isn't a commandment; it's a basic statement of fact (*Message*)
 - b. God is God alone; other gods we worship is an idol ("*no graven image*")
 - c. BTW, the Jews still have ten; "don't covet" is broken into two commands
 2. Isaiah begins by pointing back to Mt Sinai; there is no other God
 - a. Theologian Paul Tillich like to refer to God as "*the Ground of Being*"
 - 1) God is the very essence and source that is at the center of our lives
 - 2) What is our central reality that informs every other aspect of life?
 - b. We can say we believe in God but have another ground of being
 - c. That means that it is easier for us to build idols than we may think
 3. When I first started, we had a member who got divorced over softball
 - a. Husband played in 5 leagues; all of his friends were his teammates
 - 1) The only activity they did together was driving to his games
 - 2) All he did was softball (*could be golf, video games, crafts, etc.*)
 - b. He'd never say softball was God, but it was the ground of his being
 - c. How dumb is it to build a life around softball! *That's Isaiah next point*

B. **Second**, idols are dumb and the people who make them are dumb (**44:9-11**)

1. Great theologian Forrest Gump, “*Stupid is as stupid does.*” Idols are stupid
 - a. He first takes a shot at those who MAKE the idols– just human being
 - b. Some are gifted in carving and casting; God uses them in Tabernacle
 - 1) But they are just people; what makes their creation worthy to worship
 - 2) What is the difference between and idol and trophy? Same process
2. In 2nd grade I made a dog out of clay for my Mom for Mother’s Day
 - a. Well, it was supposed to be a dog; the teacher said, “*Looks like a bear*”
 - 1) She squished it and it did look sort of like bear; I didn’t want a bear!
 - 2) It was a hint; I was angling for a dog (*good thing they didn’t get bear*)
 - b. Her creativity made my glob look like a bear; that didn’t make it a bear
 - c. Craftsman fashioning an idol to look like a good didn’t make it a god.
3. Isaiah makes *ad absurdum* argument contrasting idols and lunch (**44:16-17**)
 - a. Teacher, “*Some propositions need only to be properly stated to be refuted*”
 - 1) Some things are so obviously wrong, once you state them, you see it
 - 2) For Isaiah, idolatry makes as much sense as screen door on submarine
 - b. You cut down a tree and then cut it in half– half you use to make a fire
 - 1) You use the fire to make lunch and get warm (*both of those are help*)
 - 2) Half you carve into idol... *that does nothing!* Don’t even get lunch!
 - 3) How can be sure you have the right half? Accidentally burned god half?
4. Ultimately, idolatry is the futility of seeking to save ourselves (**44:20**)
 - a. When you make your own God, you get to make up all of the rules!
 - b. You also “*feed on ashes,*” points to the emptiness of life without God
 - c. When you make idols, all you have is the strength and ability in you

C. **Third**, Isaiah end by making the direct application to Judah (**Isa 44:21-22**)

1. Judah would pursue idols and pursue them until she landed in Babylon
 - a. Isaiah is writing to those captives as they wait not patiently to return
 - b. Here he reminds them that they are forgiven, God’s redeemed people
 - c. For goodness sake, go to lunch but don’t go back to those dead idols
2. Point: Israel did not create their God; it was God who created Israel
 - a. And we don’t save ourselves; it is God and God alone who saves
 - b. Judah was to look to God and wait for God as she served in Babylon

III. Conclusion

- A. YouTube video from India on “*How to Make Ecco-Friendly Idol Molds*”
1. Our problem isn’t statues; our problem is not making God our core focus
 2. God is the ground of being; we must seek first God and His kingdom
 3. We cannot claim God and follow the idols of the world... just ask Judah
- B. What are idols of modern world we must turn away from? *Aren’t so modern...*
1. **Possessions:** Sin of capitalism is seeing life thru prism of possessions (**Lk 12:15**)
 - a. Michael Douglas’ speech in Wall Street, “*Greed is good; greed works*”
 - 1) You remember what Paul calls greed, right? It’s idolatry (**Col 3:5**)
 - 2) Jesus warns us, “*Be on your guard against all kinds of greed...*”
 - b. World: “*Who dies with most toys wins.*” God: “*After that, judgement*”
 2. **Praise:** Sometimes our idol is status; our place with other people (**Matt 23:5**)
 - a. Some of them believed in Jesus, but were afraid to lose status (**Jn 12:43**)
 - b. Some are by nature “people pleasers.” Tempted to please people first
 - c. It is idolatry if we care more about what people think than about God
 3. **Power:** Sometimes our idol is the ability to get our own way (**Matt 20:25**)
 - a. But this isn’t us, right? Preacher poll, “*Why you left your last church?*”
 - 1) Wasn’t loss of faith, better offer, not a fit, doctrine– “Church Politics”
 - 2) Ran afoul of the church’s power structure and the elders fired them
 - b. Tools of the campaign were gossip, manipulation, secret meeting, power
 4. **Pleasure:** Corinth has a proverb like “*God just wants me to be happy*” (**6:13**)
 - a. Corinth saw no connection between morals and faith. Same is true today
 - b. Here’s a totally unrelated text... that helps us a great deal (**1 Tim 3:2-3**)
 - c. We’ve seen this as qualifications for elders, but keep it in its context
 - 1) Timothy is in Ephesus; Ephesians stresses Christian life (**4:1, 22-23**)
 - 2) He elaborated on each quality of elders (**Eph 4:31, 5:3; 5:18, 6:25**)
 - d. When choosing elders, look for men serious about living out their faith
 - 1) This list a way of determining how successful prospective leader is
 - 2) These are things we are all supposed to be doing in living our faith
 - e. To claim to have faith but to refuse to live it is an insidious idolatry!
- C. It’s not enough to believe that Our God is alive; we must live like He is alive