

The Golden Cows and the Danger of Idolatry

Bible Verses Referenced: Exodus 25-32

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of this glorious day with beautiful weather and an opportunity to come and to sing and to offer praise to you. We ask that our hearts would be attuned to right worship of you, that while we are prone to making idols, that our hearts would remain fixed on you as you are, as revealed to us in the pages of your scriptures.

May the ministry and preaching of Your Word be Your Word for the sake and glory of Your Son, Jesus, in His name we pray. Amen. Amen. As we're working our way through the story of the Exodus, we've come to a very famous passage about the making of the Golden Cows. So, we've called this sermon on Golden Cows.

And I want to reflect with you a little bit as to why we make idols and what kind of consequences idols have in our life and ultimately what God would have us do about them. But the first question, you know, why do we make idols? What is it about us that are idol factories? And why a cow of all things?

Have you ever wondered that? You know, what's the appeal of worshipping a golden cow? Well, first, cows are still things that we worship. You've probably heard the phrase the cash cow. What are we talking about when we say the cash cow? We're talking about a business that generates a lot of income and spurs off a lot of financial wealth. And we like those kinds of businesses, don't we?

So much so that we will give our lives for them. And we will spend our time and our focus and our energy on that cash cow. Another place where we use the same language is the bull market. We like the bull market better than the bear market, right? Why do we like the bull market? Because it's spinning off wealth and money.

A cow is a symbol of provision. If you were a herds people, cows are your business. That's what you do for a living, is you grow cows, and there's nothing more profitable and nothing more provisionary from a feed your tummy perspective than steak and cows and the milk that they provide.

We are prone to worship the work of our hands. And you see this in our day and age, though our idols may not be specifically golden cows in many ways they are. I remember when I was a young kid, I went to the home of one of the VPs of the Ford Motor Company. And in his home, he had a golden Model T.

And I was just fascinated by that. But for that particular family, that was the place of provision for their life, was the Model T, was the Ford car. So, think about, in your own life, what it is that grabs your attention, that provides for you, that gives you something that is primarily the work of your hands. And you start to get close to what your potential idols might be.

But why do we make idols? And what is an idol? Fundamentally, an idol is something that we create to worship because our hearts have a difficulty getting around the worship of God as He truly is. I mean, God is, number one, invisible to us. Number two, He is awesome in power.

Moses and the Israelites had come to Mount Sinai, and there God revealed Himself to them in a glory cloud of power and might, thundering voice. And the reason that the text tells us that He did that was so that they would listen to His Word and fear Him.

And there's a part of us that God is so transcendent and so other and so powerful and beyond our comprehension that we tend to want to diminish our gods and bring them under our control and under our fabrication and down to size so that we can worship something that is a lot more tangible and more understandable.

I'm reminded of the scene from Talladega Nights where they're at the dinner table and they're saying they're the dinner table blessing and the guy prays to baby Jesus. And then they get into a debate about it like, why are you always praying to baby Jesus? He goes, well, that's my Jesus. I like really

relate to baby Jesus. And then one of the kids at the table says, well, I have my Jesus as a ninja with swords.

And so everybody creates Jesus in their own image at the table of what they like about Jesus, and they bring Him down to size. That's exactly what's happening here. God is absent for a season. This is one of the reasons why sometimes we gravitate away from praise of the living God.

When the people saw that Moses delayed, here's the key word, when Moses was delayed to come down to the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." Moses was up on the mountain actually getting instructions for exact worship of God.

And this scene is actually sandwiched between Moses being up on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights, receiving all the instructions on how to build a sanctuary for the Lord with all of its furniture and accouterments and how the curtains should be shaped. And the Word is exact. God has an exact way that He wants to be worshiped by the Israelites.

And one of the top commandments is it's not going to be according to the work of your hands by you fashioning gold and silver idols. That's a no-no. So not only does He give exact specifications of how He should be worshipped, He also gives exact specifications of how He's not to be worshipped. And so on the one side you have all of this instruction from about chapter 25 of Exodus all the way up to chapter 32.

And then after that, from about chapter 32 all the way to chapter 35, you have the building of the true tabernacle and meeting place and worship place of God. And sandwiched in between the instructions and the building of it is the anti-sanctuary, the worship of the golden cow, as a climactic moment where they attempted to worship wrongly and were confronted by God.

No, that is not the way you do it. And they actually really ticked God off in a way. It says in the text that His wrath burned hotly against them. The Lord said to Moses, "Go down to your people whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt. They have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them.

They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it. They said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who have brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And the Lord said to Moses, I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore, let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them, and I may consume them." Wow. I read one commentator.

He says, "Apparently, God does not dislike loyalty or unfaithfulness." In fact, that is very true. And the number two commandment, when God says very specifically, "You shall not make for yourself any graven image, no idols." He also then reveals something of his character and his nature.

He says, "For I am a jealous God." You know, you know who Oprah Winfrey is, right? Who doesn't know who Oprah? Oprah Winfrey does a lot of good. She's a true humanitarian, and I know a lot of people really love Oprah Winfrey. But Oprah Winfrey is not a Christian, and she was raised to be a Christian. And she, at one time in her life, had a moment in her life where she rejected Jesus and the Christian faith.

And the reason why she rejected it, and you can Google this, and you can see the actual scene of one of her television shows, where you have the studio audience gathered around, and there were Christians on the show, and one of them was mentioning about how Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. And no one comes to the Father except by Him. And Oprah contradicted her and said, "No, that's not the way it is." And then she tells the story of why she rejected the exclusive claim of Christianity to be the only way to rightly worship God.

And she tells the story about how she was in her Baptist church, and she heard the minister preaching about the Ten Commandments and getting to the place where it says, "You shall have no other gods

before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image. For I am a jealous God." And a little voice said of her own mind, "Not my God," just like Talladega nights, "Not my God.

My God is not a jealous God." I told this in the forum earlier that I actually have had a conversation with one of my relatives who is an atheist. And one of the things that she was offended about when I was talking with her about my faith, is she says, well, your God is just so self-centered. He just wants everybody to go around and worship Him.

And He's not OK with us worshipping however we want to worship. I'm like, that's right. That's exactly how God is. Why? Why is it so important that the relationship with the Lord not be like an open marriage? We want to go and try Hinduism over here. We can try worshiping the tree gods or whatever we want to worship.

Why is God not allow us to go and worship whatever way we want, whatever God we want? Why is He so jealous for worship of Him alone? And the answer is, is because when our lives become disoriented from proper worship, we as human beings become corrupted and diminished. Listen again to the text.

"Go down for your people whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, they have corrupted themselves. Our lives are like mirrors. We are made to reflect the glory of the living God. And when our lives get out of alignment from right and true worship of the one true God, as God has revealed Himself, we become disfigured and corrupted in our nature and our being.

But we will reflect the character and the quality of our gods. So you worship a golden cow? Well, that will disfigure your personhood and make you into that image. And it becomes a very vicious cycle that manifests in our lives. So how do we get out of it? We'll end with this. Moses stands as a mediator for the Israelites.

They have surely sinned, and they've incurred, as the text says, the judgment of God, the white wrath of the Lord. And the Lord is ready to basically judge them harshly. But Moses stands as an intercessor to the Israelites. He reminds God of other aspects of God's character. Yes, this is an injustice, Lord, and a violation against your nature.

But you also have a nature of compassion and covenant faithfulness to your promises. And he reminds the Lord, this is really bold of Moses. He reminds the Lord, "Do you remember the promise that you made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that when you called me at the burning bush, you said, 'I am the Lord of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and how you promised to take these Israelites out of the land of Egypt and bring them into the land of promise.' It says, "Remember your own promises, Lord.

And even though we are here breaking our covenant with you, I appeal to you to not break your covenant with us." Because what would people say if they heard that the God who had rescued these people out of Egypt only brought them into the desert to lay them to waste.

Be merciful, Lord, and He appeals to God's character and nature of love and grace and His faithfulness to His promises. And it's a beautiful moment, but the Lord turns, it says. He relents from the judgment that He was going to bring. Now the promise of our new covenant with the Lord in Jesus is that Jesus is our great high priest.

And the writer of Hebrews describes Jesus as greater even than Moses in his intercessions, as He is one who has come before the sanctuary of the Lord and laid down His life to pay the price for our idolatrous sins, in order that He might redeem us and bring us into that reconciled relationship with God. And so He stands at the right hand of God the Father. And this is what the text says in Hebrews.

And He lives to intercede for us. Just picture the Lord Jesus right now going, I paid the price for that idol worship in that person's life. I took care of that Father. Have mercy on that one. Forgive him. Forgive her. Constantly, never-ending, eternally interceding for you and contending for you on behalf of your soul and your spirit.

This is the one who we worship. And we are called to worship Him exclusively and rightly. Give your heart, mind, soul, and strength to the living God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Give yourself to Him faithfully, and turn away from any vain idols that you have in your life.