

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

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Called to Speak for the Lord – the Book of Jeremiah

Whom do You Fear?

December 13, 2020

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 10

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 44:6-20

1 Samuel 5:1-4 ESV When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. (2) Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon. (3) And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. (4) But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold.

Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him.

The Philistines feared Dagon – a worthless, lifeless statue that couldn't even stand up by himself. Even after the Lord showed Himself mighty to them, they *still embraced Dagon and wanted the Lord to get out of their country.*

Who or what are you afraid of? What do you fear? There are of course many smaller, secondary things in this world that are worthy of a certain kind of fear – fire, hurricanes, cobras, lions, electricity – but what we want to consider this morning is that which we fear *in the sense of ordering and shaping our lives. Of doing what we do or not doing what we avoid. Having a fear of something or someone which directs the very concept we have of who we are, or our ideas of how things in this world work, of what is valuable, of what is right and of what is wrong.*

These questions and subjects are really condensed down into this short question:

Who is your god?

Jeremiah has just given us the correct answer to these things:

Jeremiah 9:23-24 ESV Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, (24) but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

Our god, to rephrase the question in these terms is, *what or whom we boast in. That which we fear. That which we attribute wisdom, might, and value to so that it directs how we think about...everything and what we do...how we live our lives day by day?*

Who is your god? Who or what is it that you fear and boast in? The answer to these questions indicates whether you are free or in bondage. Whether you know the Lord or not. Whether you are on the narrow way to life or on the broad way to hell.

Idols. False gods. There is something in human beings, something that entered into man at the Fall, something that is a *bent* toward worshiping the creature rather than the Creator. It is called by various names, the most common of which is *idolatry*.

Any thing or any one whom we fear and attribute wisdom, might, and value to, is an idol. It is our false god. It is a Dagon which cannot speak, cannot move, cannot help, and yet to which men and women fear, serve, obey and...worship.

Romans 1:21-25 ESV For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (22) Claiming to be wise, they became fools, (23) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (24) Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,

(25) because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the

Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Even a real Christian who truly knows Christ, fears and worships and obeys the Lord, must struggle with this aspect of his sinful flesh. This tendency to fear something or someone, to consider that thing or person to have power, wisdom, and value that is false and yet which can establish fortresses/strongholds in our minds which need to be blown up by God's truth.

What or who, in your life, in your thinking, do you fear? To what or to whom do you attribute wisdom, power, and value so that you fear it, obey it, direct your life by it, take counsel from, look to for rescue, cling to as if it were a treasure. (Think of the dwarf king in the Hobbit and that massive treasure room that finally took over his mind and destroyed him).

We are called to put these false gods away.

1 John 5:21 ESV Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

I cannot tell you this enough. *Flee from idols.*

1 Corinthians 10:21 ESV You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

In order to help us see with clarity the foolish and destructive evil of idolatry, Jeremiah here in chapter 10 compares the false with the true. You remember that the people of Judah, as had the now destroyed northern nation of Israel, continually embraced false gods and habitually adopted the idols of the nations around them. Here the Lord warns them against adopting the idols of Babylon as they are about to become captives in that land (and some were already there)-

Jeremiah 10:1-5 ESV Hear the word that the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel. (2) Thus says the LORD: “Learn not **the way of the nations**, nor be dismayed at **the signs of the heavens** because the nations are dismayed at them, (3) for **the customs of the peoples** are vanity. A tree from the forest is cut down and worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman. (4) They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot

move. (5) Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. **Do not be afraid of them**, for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good.”

To worship something is to fear it. That which we ultimately fear is our god. We are not to fear the things that the world fears and worships. Notice the terms Jeremiah describes idolatry by-

- The way of the nations
- The signs of the heavens
- The customs of the peoples

It is the way, it is the custom of fallen man to embrace idols as his gods. He is as the reformers called him, an idol factory. He is religion gone wrong. And one of the most common creatures he worship and fears to which he attributes power and value is – *the signs of the heavens*.

We are coming up on an astronomical event that many people are excited about. Here is a description of it and you can see even here in these words a hint of “worship” -

Astronomers use the word conjunction to describe meetings of planets and other objects on our sky’s dome. They use the term great conjunction to describe meetings of the two biggest worlds in our solar system, mighty Jupiter and glorious ringed Saturn. The coming great conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn will be on the day of the solstice: December 21, 2020. Jupiter-Saturn conjunctions happen every 20 years; the last one was in the year 2000.

But these conjunctions aren’t all created equal. The 2020 great conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn will be the closest since 1623 and the closest observable since 1226!

On December 21, Jupiter and Saturn will be only 0.1 degree apart. Some say the pair will look like an “elongated star” on that date. Will they? Or will they look like a double planet? To know for sure, we’ll have to look and see. They’ll surely be an appealing and mind-expanding sight. [earthsky.org]

These are the kinds of “signs of the heavens” that we are not to fear. Jupiter and Saturn and the universe are not gods. They have no power to do good

or evil. They are created, lifeless, objects placed in the heavens by the Lord to show us HIS glory and lead us to worship HIM.

When human beings worship created things, they are bowing down to – get this picture – *a scarecrow in a cucumber field*. Think of the scarecrow in the Wizard of Oz – only forget him speaking or moving. Just see him hanging there on a pole. Then see people bowing down to him, praying to him, fearing him, looking to him for rescue. That is exactly what idol worship is. It is insanity. And those who worship idols –

- Become like them progressively
- Will never hear from them
- Will not have a single prayer answered by them

In contrast –

Jeremiah 10:6-16 ESV There is none like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is great in might. (7) Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For this is your due; for among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like

you. (8) They are both stupid and foolish;

the instruction of idols is but wood! (9) Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz. They are the work of the craftsman and of the hands of the goldsmith; their clothing is violet and purple; they are all the work of skilled men.

(10) But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation.

(11) Thus shall you say to them: “The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens.” (12) It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.

(13) When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, and he brings forth the wind from his storehouses.

(14) Every man is stupid and without knowledge; every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols, for his images are false, and there is no breath in them. (15) They are worthless, a work of delusion; at the time of their punishment they shall perish.

(16) Not like these is he who is the portion of Jacob, for he is the one who formed all things, and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance; the LORD of hosts is his name.

That which we fear, that to which we attribute wisdom and might and value – that is our god or even for a Christian, one of our gods. Part of the Lord's work of sanctification in us is the progressive exposure and destruction of any idols we still cling to. As the old hymn writer worded this prayer:

Break down every idol, cast out
every foe;
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter
than snow.

Well, in Christ we are whiter than snow. Our sins have been washed away and yet we still do battle with our sinful flesh. One of the most common and chief battlefields in this war is this

matter of the identification and destruction of our false gods.

2 Kings 23:24-25 ESV Moreover, Josiah put away the mediums and the necromancers and the household gods and the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might establish the words of the law that were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD. (25) Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him.

Common Idols of our Day

You have heard me say before many times, and I will keep saying it many times, that the most common bondage and most common idol that results in that bondage which I see in people is *family*. Even in the church we see it as *family is worshipped virtually as the essence of the gospel*. It is no wonder that Jesus, more than once, warned us of this business of making father, mother, sister, brother the object of our worship –

Luke 14:25-26 ESV Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, (26) “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Matthew 10:34-39 ESV “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. (35) For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. (36) And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. (37) Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (39) Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Luke 12:51-53 ESV Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. (52) For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. (53) They will be divided, father against son and son

against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

It is not surprising then that John Bunyan opened up his Pilgrim’s Progress with Christian having to face leaving his wife behind when she would not go with him out of the City of Destruction.

You are taught from many different sources, including most churches today, that *family is what life is all about. That in the end it is family that really matters. That no matter what you must forgive and accept people no matter how wicked they are, because they are family.* And if you buy into that, you are accepting the worship of an idol, you are submitting to evil bondage, and you cannot follow the Lord. You cannot serve Christ and idols. [NOTE: The lure of the idol becomes even more powerful if family *claims to be Christian themselves, but are not.*]]

Are you an idol priest? Do you teach others the theology of idolatry? It is actually quite easy to do if we are not careful and if we slide into embracing things like this when talking to

someone whose family members are hindering them from obeying Christ:

- But she is your mother
- He is your father
- Oh, you can't do that – he is your brother/sister

And so people listen and they remain in bondage to this idolatrous system of “family.” They serve it. They get their counsel from it. They value it more and more – and they fail to follow Christ. They embrace the idol and are enslaved to it.

That is just one example of a very common idol we must face up to. There are of course others, but they all share in common this business of fearing, valuing, attributing power to, looking to for wisdom – and this is the boasting that Jeremiah warns against. This is idolatry.

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|---------------------|------------------------------|
| I will set you Free | You can't be free without me |
| I am the Way | Take my road |

Matthew 19:27-30 ESV Then Peter said in reply, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?”

(28) Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

(29) And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. (30) But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

| Christ Says- | Idol Says- |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Fear Me | No, Fear me |
| I am Wisdom | Listen to me |
| I am True Treasure | I am what is really valuable |
| I am mighty to Save | I will give you power |