

Exodus Chapter 20 v 4 - 6

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[0 : 00] Well, we've come to worship God this morning. What is this God like that we come to worship? Why does he deserve our worship and our praise? Well, our verse on the screen, Psalm 145, verse 8, it tells us what he's like.

The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. Notice that the Lord is gracious and compassionate.

That means he is summed up in that word rich in love. But notice he's also slow to anger. He isn't a God who doesn't get angry.

He is a God who is angry with sin and with wickedness. But most of all, above all, he is rich in love. And because of his love, he has made a way for his anger to be appeased in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, a way for forgiveness for us, that we can come and draw near to him.

And we come because we have experienced his grace and we know his compassion day by day.

So we're going to stand and sing a first hymn. It's going to come up on the screen.

[1 : 09] Oh, the mercy of God. Let's stand as we sing. Let's stand as we sing. Please.

Let's stand as we sing. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

For the glory of God is dressed in this sky, his image and likeness revealed to us all.

Amen. Amen.

[4 : 23] Let's come to our God in prayer together. Let us all pray. Amen. We are found, O Lord, our God, once more in your presence.

We thank you that wherever we go, wherever we've been, wherever we shall go, you are there. For it is impossible for us to escape your presence, impossible for us to go to any place in the universe where you are not there.

We thank you that we can go to the highest heights, said David in his psalm, and you're there, the depths, and you're there to the east, to the west, wherever we go. Even darkness and night cannot hide us from you.

For you are the omnipresent God, the God who is everywhere. But we thank you especially that we can gather together as your people, and you have promised to be with us in a very special way.

Not just in being present, but being present to bless, being present to help, being present to encourage, being present to speak, being present to minister.

[5 : 35] And so, Lord, we thank you that when we come together, we know that you are here, and you are here to speak to us, and meet with us, and deal with us, and change us. And, Lord, we pray that in our hearts there may be that same desire.

That we're here this morning, not because we must be here, not because we have been forced to be here, or because we think we should be here, but rather we're here because we want to be here, because, Lord, we know that we need you.

We know that we need your help, your grace. We know, first of all, we need your forgiveness. For each one of us, confess, O Lord, that we have sinned in this past week, even in this past 24 hours. Lord, we've let you down in the way that we've acted and thought, the things that we've seen and done. Lord, we know that we have not been the people that you want us to be, that you've saved us to be.

And yet we thank you that all our sins, great and small in our measure, we thank you that they have been covered, cleansed, forgiven through your Son. For we thank you, O Lord, that you have come to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

[6 : 42] Thank you that it's impossible for us to come to you to, as it were, climb to heaven, or to gain your acceptance or favor. We know that we could never know you apart from you, first making

yourself known to us.

So we thank you that you have made yourself known to the whole world in the person of Jesus. Thank you that he is God and man. Thank you that he is the one who came and lived our life, walked our walk.

The one who experienced our experiences. The one who knows and understands. The one who has risen from the dead. Who is alive forevermore. The one to whom and in whom we find hope, peace, joy, grace, love.

Thank you, O Lord, life. And come, O Lord, again and ask that you would be present amongst us in a way that we know and feel and experience. We pray, O Lord, that we, your people, may know what it is to bring you our worship and our praise.

That, O Lord, our hearts may increase in love and faith. That, O Lord, as we hear you speaking to us, so, again, we may be changed. Thank you, Lord, that we are here and that you are here.

[7 : 52] O Lord, make us again to be those people who know that we have met with you. In leaving this brief time, may we go in the sense and the presence of your Holy Spirit.

For we ask these things in and through the name of Jesus Christ, your Son and our God. Amen. We need now from God's Word, from our Bibles.

And if you'd like to turn with me to Exodus and chapter 20. Sorry, no, to Romans and chapter 1. We're going to be back to Exodus 20 later. Romans and chapter 1.

And if you've got one of the church Bibles, that's page 1128. Page 1128. We're going to break into chapter 1 and then read through into the beginning of chapter 2.

And hopefully we'll see as we come to Exodus 20 to look at the second of the Ten Commandments. We'll see the connection there that is made. And seeing again the unity of God's Word, the unity of the whole of the Bible, speaking the same message in every part.

[8 : 58] We're going to pick up from verse 16. So Romans and chapter 1 and verse 16. We're going to read all the way through to the end of the chapter and then into chapter 2 into verse 4.

So here is the Word of God. The righteousness of God is revealed.

Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God, nor gave thanks to Him. But their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

[10 : 26] Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being, and birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things, rather than the Creator, who is forever praised.

Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.

In the same way, the men also abandoned natural relations with women, and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.

[11 : 32] They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful.

They invent ways of doing evil. They disobey their parents. They have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Although they know God's righteous decree, that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things, but also approve of those who practice them.

You, therefore, have no excuse. You who pass judgment on someone else. For at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them, and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

[12:47] Tough need cause it to grow. So let's pray together. We live, O Lord, in a rapidly changing world and society.

Times, for us, it can seem as if we can't quite keep up with what's going on around and about, and in the world, we feel perhaps overwhelmed. Yet, Lord, we know that these are no problems to you. Your word says that all the nations are but a drop, a drop in the bucket, and, O Lord, you are so much greater and more powerful. You have all things, as it were, at your fingertips, and you work in all things for your goodwill and purpose.

We praise you and thank you for all that you're doing, and we know, O Lord, that you are leading this world to that point in time when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. We thank you that that purpose, that plan, that hope that we have, O Lord, in Christ is a certainty, and that this world is not spiralling out of control, but truly is heading towards that day when you come, not as that weak and humble baby in the manger, but as you come that second time with glory, power, and judgment. And, O Lord, when every living person, including us, must stand before you and give an account and be judged according to our lives and according to our sins.

[14:10] We thank you again for the confidence that we have that because you have taken our sins at the cross, Lord Jesus, those who've put their trust in you, those still sinful, those still imperfect, Lord, know that we have nothing to fear from that day but everything to look forward to in that day.

And yet, Lord, as we look to that day, we know that around about us there are many things happening which grieve us and sadden us as well as encourage us. Thank you for the encouragement of Ben and Liz and the family being settled in Stoke, and we pray that as Ben begins that ministry as pastor alongside Phil Roberts that you would help him, equip him, and Liz as well and the children.

Bless them and use them there and encourage them, we pray. We thank you again, O Lord, for Adrian and Antonia. We ask you to richly bless their ministry in Gloucester and the work that Adrian does with ECM.

They seek to reach particularly Muslims with your gospel. We pray for the International Lounge and the many outreach opportunities that they have created that these might be blessed by you. We thank you for the many who received tracts and even took Christian literature yesterday.

We pray that, Lord, these things may not be thrown to the ground but read, and as they are read that your Holy Spirit would work in the hearts and the minds of those who read them and that, Lord, they may be drawn to you and ultimately drawn to repentance and faith in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[15:39] We praise you and thank you again for the freedom we have in our nation to do that, to be able to speak of Christ and proclaim him and declare him, and we pray that that freedom may continue. We pray, Lord, again that there's a nation you would guide and lead us.

We ask, O Lord, that you would overrule in all the plans and the will of government. We pray again that you would send to us the greatest need that we have, and that is that spiritual revival, that turning of many hearts and lives to the things of God, turning away from the things which are material.

Lord, you taught us and commanded us not to make idols, not to bow down and worship physical things, and yet, Lord, how we do that day by day, whether it be the worship of money or of possessions, whether it be the worship of other people or personalities, whether it be the worship of ourselves, pleasure, or whatever.

Lord, deliver us from these things, set us free from their bondage, bring us into the joy and liberty of worshipping you, the living and only God. We pray again that you would have mercy upon our world at this time.

We think of that nation of America, Lord, going to the polls and to election. We pray again that the outcome may be as you see fit, Lord, because you have a purpose for that nation as you do for all nations.

[16:57] We pray for your people there who love you and own you and honor your word that you would encourage them and that you would help them to be faithful witnesses in a corrupt generation. We ask that for ourselves too, that day by day in the way that we live, we may be the people who show ourselves to be those that love God and follow Christ.

And to that end, we pray, help us as we come to your word, as we come to understand and apply your word to our lives. We pray that your Holy Spirit would help us, that we may be those who hear and respond and act with faith and obedience.

For we ask all these things as we bring our praise and our worship to you in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Let's stand and sing together from our hymn books this time, 182.

In our hymn books, Thou art the everlasting word. Let's stand as we sing. 182. Amen. Turn with me, if you would, to Exodus and chapter 20.

Exodus and chapter 20. Verses 4 and following. Verses 4 and following.

[18:26] The second of these Ten Commandments or ten words that God gave to his people after he had brought them out of slavery, brought them into the freedom of the journey to the promised land.

And this is God speaking to them for the very first time and has already given them that first commandment. You shall have no other gods before me. Verse 4, the second of these commandments.

You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Within the grounds of the British Embassy in Bangkok in Thailand is a seated bronze statue of Queen Victoria.

It was put there in 1903, two years after she died. For the past hundred years or so, it has become a place of pilgrimage and prayer, this statue.

[19:40] Not British expats longing for England, but for the Thai people themselves. Fresh garlands of flowers, are laid upon her lap regularly, along with prayers and requests that she would grant childless couples the gift of children.

How Queen Victoria became this fertility symbol, we're not really sure. No one knows. It could well be because she herself had nine children in all. Or it could be because on one occasion when she met the Siamese ambassador, that's I am, was the old name for Thailand, he greeted her with the words that she was a great white elephant.

That sounds very rude if you went up to the Queen now and called her that, but it was a term of endearment. In fact, it was a term of flattery because the white elephant in the culture of Thailand is regarded as a sacred symbol of plenty.

Perhaps the reputation stuck. Now, in one sense, it is humorous that people continue to do such things and put their hope in such things, but of course, it's also very pitiful as well.

Apart from the very sad experience for many people of not being able to have children and many people will go to far greater lengths than simply putting a prayer or a garland of flowers on a statue in the hope to gain the blessing of parenthood, we see just how pitiful it is, how sad it is that men and women will put their hope in and look to idols of any sort or shape to help them to worship.

[21:18] Now, this second commandment doesn't forbid the making of statues. This second commandment doesn't forbid, as many extreme Islamic people would think, that you cannot have a representation or a picture of a flower or a plant or an animal or a bird or whatever it may be.

We know that it's not that because elsewhere, later on, even in Exodus, God gives commandments to make things in the form of creatures. Remember how he commanded Moses to make that bronze serpent so that the people, when they were bitten by the snake, they looked to it and be healed.

Where in the temple itself, God gave commandments that over the ark of the covenant, two angels, cherubim, should be made and fashioned. So, God is not saying that we must not make statues, artistic, nothing wrong with artistic temperament, nothing wrong with some of the great works of art we've seen through history.

But, clearly what God says is that we are not to worship those things, to bow down to those things, to use those things in any way in our worship of him or our approach to him.

And so, this second commandment is very closely linked, isn't it, to the first. For God says, you shall have no other gods before me. That's who must be worshipped. God must be worshipped. No one else or nothing else.

[22 : 39] But also, in the second commandment, we're told how God is to be worshipped. Or rather, how he's not to be worshipped. He's not to be worshipped through the use of symbols, signs, pictures.

One of the things perhaps people may say here in the church when they come in is, where's the cross? Why haven't you got a cross at the front of your church or your building? Well, there's nothing wrong in one sense in having a cross at the front of a building or church, but if we're not careful, even that can be something through which we come to worship God.

We focus on that, on the physical rather than on the spiritual. But when we've been looking at these commandments and introduction to these commandments, we've recognized that all of these commandments reveal to us something of God.

They tell us what God is like and they tell us about his character, about his nature, about his personality and ultimately, of course, they tell us about Christ. So what does this commandment teach us about the Lord our God?

Well, of course, it shows us, first of all, that God is infinite, that you can't limit him. By having no idols means you can't bring God down to a particular shape or size.

[23 : 52] You can't make him into something when he is, in fact, immakable, uncreated, has no limits. Psalmist, in Psalm 145, says this, his greatness no one can fathom.

There's no limit to the God. Now, of course, an idol is something that's just fashioned, a statue, even a great, some of these great huge Buddhas that you see on the television or maybe you've visited in places like Thailand, they're still limited, they're still small in comparison to the greatness of God.

And, of course, they're lifeless. And God is not lifeless. God is not unmoving. God is, in fact, full of life. He's the ever-living God, the eternal God, and he's the one who gives life himself.

Jesus says, for as the Father has life in himself, so he's granted the Son to have life in himself. Idols are physical, but God is spirit.

Jesus says in John 4, 24, God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth. And, of course, God is invisible. An idol is visible.

[25 : 02] It's something that we see, but God is the invisible God, Colossians tells us. Now, we may say, well, you know, Peter, this commandment doesn't really have a lot to say to us, does it?

It may have something to say to Catholics who have images and idols and Mary and other things that they pray to and through. It may have something to say to Hindus and to Buddhists and to some other religions.

It really has nothing to say to us in the 21st century, those of us here in Whitby in 2016. But just because we do not carve an image of God, we may create our own image of God in our thinking of him.

By that I mean this. Some people you might speak to and they would say, I see God like this. I see him as a Father Christmas sort of figure sat on a cloud. Or somebody else might say, I see God as my mate, a buddy.

Or we may say, I can't see God sending anyone to hell. What are we doing in that? We are creating in our own minds an idol, an image of God, of what he is like or what we think he should be like or of what we perceive him to be.

[26 : 16] Now whenever we do that, whenever we place our own ideas onto God or make him into our own likeness, image, or picture in our own minds, we are breaking this commandment.

We are falling foul of this commandment. We are making a false image of God, a false idol of God, a false picture of God. So it does have something to say to us, doesn't it?

Teaching us who God is, what he's like, that he cannot be bound, he cannot be restricted, he cannot be closed in and made into something which is physical, man-made, whether in thought or in actual image.

But also it teaches us particularly, which is important, that God is intimate. God is someone we can have a relationship with. God is someone that is personal.

He is one that we can have a real, close, personal knowledge of. And I think that's important because of what God says there in verse 5. I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.

[27 : 25] Okay, an idol, a statue, a figurine, or whatever it may be, an icon in the Orthodox Church or whatever, it's not, you can't have a relationship with it. It's just there, it's a picture, it's a thing, it's an object, it's not personal, God is personal.

And therefore, he's a God who feels and has jealousy. Now we need to be very careful in understanding this phrase, it crops up again and again in the Old Testament particularly, but also in the New Testament too, where God is described as being jealous.

We think of that word in a negative concept, don't we, when we think of somebody who is jealous of another, but we need to think of it perhaps more in the sense of the word zealous for.

See, the Bible speaks about God having two types of jealousy or two objects of jealousy. First of all, we're told, the Bible tells us God is jealous for his people, i.e.

he's zealous to care for them, he's jealous to look after them in that sense, to protect them from all harm. In the prophet Joel we read, the Lord will be jealous for his land and take care or take pity on his people.

[28 : 39] So God is jealous to care for and protect and look after, he's zealous. But there's something else as well and this is what particularly comes through here and is strong is that God is jealous for the affection and the love of his people.

In other words, he only wants them to love him, to put their love towards him. The psalmist says this about how the Israelites often sadly got this wrong.

They angered God with their high places, that's where they worshipped, their idols. They aroused his jealousy with idols. Now it's that second type of jealousy that God is speaking about here. He is jealous for the affection and the love of his people just as any loving wife would be jealous for the love of her husband. No wife would say, I don't care whether my husband gives his love to another woman.

Of course not. You're jealous for that love. You want him only to love you in the way that he should and the same a husband for his wife. So God will not share his people's love with anything or anyone else.

[29 : 45] Especially as we realised when we looked at the other week that you shall have no other gods before me. All other gods actually don't exist. They aren't real. They're imagined.

They're man-made. They're created but they don't have any power. They don't actually exist at all. So God is jealous for the love of his people. That's what it's telling us.

He is someone who we have a relationship, someone who we can love and who loves us, someone into whom we've been brought into this covenant, this marriage, this wonderful, binding, lasting relationship.

relationship. So when we commit adultery, sorry, when we commit idolatry, get that right, two very words, very different, when we commit idolatry, we are actually acting in an unloving, even a hateful way towards God.

You see, if we dislike God, as many people do, or we dislike the way that God acts or the things that God does, then what do we do? We create another God in our own likeness, a God who suits us better, a God who fits what we want a God to be.

[31 : 00] What are we doing? We're rejecting God, we're saying, God, we hate you, we dislike you, we think that there should be a better God than you. It's a terrible thing, isn't it? It's not just an insignificant thing.

We read there in Romans 1, 25, didn't we? They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator who is forever praised our men. And then just a little later on, Paul describes these people as, amongst other things, God-haters. Sin is enmity to God.

All sin is enmity to God. All sin is essentially hostility against what God is, what God wants, what God does.

Paul writes in Romans 8, the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's laws, nor can it do so. So whenever we choose sin over God, we are saying to God, we hate you, we are against what you stand for.

[32 : 12] Serious, isn't it? It's not flippant, it's not unimportant. That makes sense then perhaps why God responds as he does or says he will respond to this sin of idolatry when he says he will punish

the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.

So again, he makes that link between idolatry, having another God, or worshipping something or someone else as being hatred towards him and he actively responds to it.

If you've got the authorised version, instead of the word punishing, it says visiting the sin of those who hate me upon their children. And the word there is not an easy word to translate, it's Hebrew obviously, but it has that sense of actively responding towards sin.

And what we see is that God actively allows sin or the sin of people to reap an awful misery upon their children and grandchildren.

Now that's something that comes out, I think, in that Romans passage. If you've got your sort of finger in there that's helpful to turn back to it for a moment, Romans 1, where we're told the response of God to the sinfulness of people who denied him and turned to idols and turned to immorality homosexuality, lesbianism and other things as well, all sorts of sexual immorality is included in that.

[33 : 39] Notice that again in a guide, how God responds. Verse 21, for although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile, and so on.

So what is the response of God? Verse 24, therefore God gave them over in their sinful desires. Okay? Then, verse 26, because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.

Then again, in verse 28, so God gave them over. Do you see what happens? The wonderful thing of God is this, his common grace we might call, his wonderful grace is that God restrains evil in the world, restrains people from committing sins, wicked sins, in many ways.

That's why when you speak to somebody in the street and they say, well I'm a good person, I haven't murdered anybody and I haven't committed adultery and I haven't robbed a bank and I haven't done all these things. Actually, what has happened is that God in his mercy to them has kept them back from those things.

Kept them back. And you and I, dear friends, we often use that phrase, don't we? We look at somebody who's fallen into a particular sin or particular situation, we even use the phrase, there but for the grace of God go I.

[34 : 55] But we don't actually realise the theology behind that. It's this, God has kept us from making that same similar mistake. God has kept us, preserved us and protected us in a wonderful way.

But what happens is this, that if men and women continually sin against God, continually press and push against him as they do in idolatry as he says here, then what happens is this, God says, right, have your way.

I'm not going to hold you back any longer. I'm not going to keep those fences of restraint that keep you safe from damaging yourself and your family. I'm going to let you go. That's a terrible thing. The worst thing that God can do for you or for anyone else is to let you have your own way. It's crazy, isn't it? People think that if only I could do what I wanted, I'd be happy.

If only I could do what I think is best, then the world would be a better place. But actually, if we were allowed by God, simply to do what we wanted to do, to give a free reign in our lives that we would utterly destroy ourselves.

[35 : 59] Why is it do you think that the world hasn't been blown up in nuclear holocaust? Why? Because God has kept the world. Those of us who grew up in the 70s and the 80s, we were worried all the time, the threat of the red button.

Even now it's being brought back with this foolish talk of Trump having the finger on the button and creating a world war. He can't do anything unless God allows him to do it.

God will keep this world until the day when Christ comes again. So God holds back, but when we push against him, then God will let us have our free reign. He will let us have our rope with which to hang ourselves.

love. And that's exactly what he's saying here. And we see it around about us, don't we? We see the reality of this in our society, in our community, in our world, perhaps even in our own lives. We see all around us in different ways God giving people over to the effect of their sin being passed on to another generation. We see the sad cycle of one generation following the patterns of the previous generation, whether that be in immorality, whether that be in the pattern of violence within the home or outside the home, whether it be in the abuse of substances or alcohol.

[37 : 14] One generation seems to follow another, children following the same pattern of their fathers, of their grandfathers and so on. Those are the obvious problems, but there's some that are a bit more subtle.

See the love of money, the living for pleasure, those things which are acceptable in our society today, they're passed on from father to daughter as well, aren't they?

So that the man who lives his life for his career and lives his life for money and lives his life for power and influence and so on, passes on to his children the same empty way of life.

Somehow these things are what satisfy and that daughter takes them into her marriage, into her relationships, into her family and passes them on with all the bitter results that follow.

But, dear friends, but wonderfully this commandment reveals to us that God is a gracious God whose grace is bigger than sin's curse.

[38 : 19] For verse 5 says, yes, punishing, visiting the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but verse 6, showing love to a thousand generations, those who love me.

Isn't that marvelous? There is sin in its curse and its horrific effects upon the lives of people and in one sense God says the limit is just to a few generations, but here is the grace of God.

The grace of God has no limit. There haven't been a thousand generations of people yet who've lived upon this earth. It's endless, it's ongoing, it's continuous. That's what the New Testament teaches us elsewhere, isn't it?

Romans 5, verse 20, where sin abounds, grace does much more abound. That's the AV. Or when sin increased, grace increased all the more. God's anger is limited against sin, but his grace and love is endless.

Psalms 30, verse 5, for his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime. Isn't it marvelous?

[39 : 27] Isn't it wonderful, dear friends, that when we love God and we seek him, that the blessings that we receive rest not only upon us, but upon our children as well.

Isn't it amazing? Isn't it incredible when we see within just one family, several generations, following Christ and loving him? What a blessing that is.

And it's all of God's grace. It's all of his faithfulness. It's all of his covenant promises. Just as godlessness affects children, so godliness has repercussions on our children, grandchildren and more.

If there is one motive only for us to keep this commandment and to love God and not replace him with idols and not to give our love and affections to other things, surely this is a motive in itself. That our own families might be blessed, that God's grace may be extended to our children and beyond. But of course, dear friends, there's many more reasons why we should keep the command.

[40 : 35] Just as it reveals to us the very nature of God, the very person of God, what he's like, so it reveals to us, especially, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It gives us a much better understanding of who he is. You see, in one sense, what God is doing is preventing us from speculating about what God is like by making an idol or making an image or making something created to worship him through or by.

It prevents us from that because God knew that the day would come when there would be no speculation about what God is like, but he would reveal himself completely, fully, perfectly, physically, and visibly in the person of Jesus Christ.

The writer to Colossians said of Jesus, he is the image of the invisible God. He is God seen. God revealed.

God presents himself in a visible, finite, mortal, material form. Not a lifeless idol, but a true and living saviour for sinners.

[41 : 51] And Jesus has fulfilled for us this commandment. He has brought it into its perfect understanding by being for us the very representation of God on earth.

The very thing that idols were meant to be. See, an idol was meant to be some sort of the representation of the God, the thing that could be worshipped, brought down to our level.

One of the sad and foolish things that is spoken about in some aspects of the Christian church is that somehow by having a statue of Jesus or somebody else or a crucifix or whatever, that will help us understand God better.

But it won't. It actually does the opposite. It limits God into that particular form or fashion. And as we know, for most people, when they speak about Jesus and you say, what's he like?

We'll say, oh, well, he's got blonde, long hair and blue eyes. Why? Because that's how he's presented. But he's not like that, is he? In fact, one of the things the Bible goes out of its way to do in the New Testament is to not give us a physical description of Jesus.

[43 : 00] It does that on purpose. God doesn't want us to look at the physical but at the character, the nature, the very personality of himself. Because that's really the essence of who he is.

It was imagined by those who worship idols and even today that even that these idols were sent from heaven.

There's that case and situation in Acts chapter 19 where the people were rioting against Paul and Barnabas. And they spoke about themselves as the city of Ephesus, the guardian of the great Artemis, one of the Gentile goddesses, and of her image which fell from heaven.

So they believed that there was this image of her that was given to them through whom they could worship and connect to her. See, idols that are carved or molded by human hands were molded to present or represent the power of the God.

So the people here who had left Egypt, they saw everywhere they went, gods, pictures of various gods that the Egyptians worshipped.

[44 : 08] So you had Sobek. He was the god of the Nile. So what did he look like? He had a crocodile's head because he represented that area. Horus, god of the sky, had a hawk's head and so on.

We see it as well when you see illustrations of the gods of the Hindus, the ones with the head of an elephant or the ones with many arms, speaking of in one sense their power, strength or their ability to reach into every situation.

You see, Jesus is the true likeness of God. Hebrews 1.3, the sun is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.

How? Physically? No. But in his character, in his dealings with us, in his grace, in his love, in his mercy, in his kindness. If we really want to know what God is like, we don't need to rely on our imagination.

We don't need to rely upon what other people have thought or dreamt or painted or pictured. We only need to look at Jesus. For Jesus says in John 14, anyone who's seen me has seen the Father, has seen God.

[45 : 16] Well, how do we see him? We see him here. We see him here in the pages of God's word. He is the word of God made manifest and the word of God manifests him.

Do we want to know what God is like? Read the New Testament. Read the scriptures. Read the life of Jesus. You see that Jesus fulfills what these idols can never do in that they use the idol with which to communicate with God.

It was a bit like their telegraph, their telephone, the way, the point of meeting with their God. It's before the idol they would bring their sacrifices. Their prayers and so on.

It's where they would bow down and seek the help of their God. You see, within the heart of every single person, there's a realization. It's a concept that we can't remove in one sense that somehow there needs to be a mediator between us and God.

There needs to be a go-between between us and God. And that is not an idol, but rather, or a saint, or somebody else. It is Jesus, the only mediator between God and man.

[46 : 25] Paul writes to Timothy, For there is one God, one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. It's through him we come to God. You see, you and I can never come to God as we are, can we?

We can't come to God. No matter how good we are, or how we try to live our good lives, or how we hope, we just cannot come to God. Sin is always there as a barrier, blocking the way.

God is holy and we are sinful. It's impossible for us to come as we are. In fact, the day that we do come to God, which is the day of judgment, will be the day in which we are, in one sense, destroyed and consumed with God's judgment against our sin.

If God was to reveal himself into this world now, in all of his glory and splendor, then humanity would be destroyed and burnt up, like a spaceship flying into the sun.

God's glory is too intense for us. We need someone to be the go-between, one who is both God and one who is both man. There's only one person who is both man and God, and that is the Lord

Jesus Christ.

[47 : 31] It's through Jesus that we come to God. It's through Jesus that we bring our prayers to God. That's why Jesus often taught, when you ask for this in my name, it will be done. It's through Jesus that we bring our sacrifices to God.

And of course, especially where the sacrifice for our sin has been dealt with when Jesus bore our sin upon the cross. He himself is that one sacrifice. Through him we bring our praise, our worship, and so on.

Everything flows through him, either upwards or to heaven earthwards. That's why Paul writes in Ephesians and chapter 1, we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

Christ. We come, of course, to see that the Lord Jesus Christ is the very focus of our worship. The statue, the icon, the temple, whatever it may be, is the focus of worship for the one who is devoted to their God.

It's their place of devotion. But actually, the Bible teaches us that we can give our devotion to something more than an idol or a statue. Here's what Paul writes to the Ephesians in chapter 5, verse 5.

[48 : 48] For you can be sure of this, no immoral, impure or greedy person, such a person is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

See what he's saying? It's not just the idol, the figure, the statue, whatever it may be. It is, in this case, being greedy, wanting more, wanting money.

The immoral person, the impure person, the greedy person, they are idolaters in God's sight. They have replaced their devotion for God with a devotion for something else. We still use the word to idolize somebody, don't we?

The Americans have a TV show, Pop Idol. Idol. It's used. A young person may idolize a sportswoman from the Olympics or a particular singer or entertainer.

Maybe they're idol. We may, all of us, make for ourselves idols. An idol is something that we give the most of our time to.

[49 : 52] An idol is something that we are devoted to. An idol is something that is more important to us than anything else. And that can be, yes, a sport. See the worship taking place, St.

James' Park in Newcastle and by the, is it, the Riverside in Middlesbrough. But it can be a pleasure. Something that we enjoy doing.

A relationship. Another person. Even a husband and wife. A boyfriend, a girlfriend. A house. I've got to keep my house immaculate and perfect and spotless.

Can be, yes, just a dream. Something that we long for. Hope for. Set our hearts upon. These are all idols, dear friends, that you and I find ourselves being drawn to and giving our affections to and our love to and our time to before the Lord our God.

You see, if we are Christians, if we come to faith in Christ, then we've kept this commandment because what we have done in essence, when we put our faith in Jesus, we have said, Lord, you are number one.

[51 : 02] And you are the one that I love and the one that I'm devoted to and the one that I want to follow and the one that I want to live for. Jesus made this very clear, didn't he? He says, whoever has my commands and obeys them is the one who loves me.

The one who loves me will be loved by my Father and I too will love them and show myself to them. So the question, dear friends, as we close, is there an idol that has a higher place in your life than Christ?

Is it someone, something, even a desire, a longing, a lust, a hope? Is there something that really above all else we could not bear to lose?

Can it really replace him? Can such an idol really compare to the love, the grace, the mercy, the kindness that God has lavished upon you?

Can anything in this world compare to him, anything created, anyone created, compare to the uncreated, the beautiful, the glorious, the marvelous God? Anything deserve such worship, time?

[52 : 22] Can we sing that line which we're going to sing and mean it in our hymn in the moment?

Verse 5 says this, The dearest idol I have known, whatever that idol be, help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only thee.

Can I really mean that? Can I really sing it as a prayer to God? Oh Lord our God, we are before you now as those who acknowledge that we too have allowed idols to take your place in our affections. We ask even now that you would search us, our hearts, and show us and reveal to us those things which whether they be our children or our families or home or partners, careers or money or whatever it may be.

That oh Lord you would indeed give us that grace to release and to let go of and to remove those idols from our hearts, that we may love and worship you alone, for whom to love is life itself and whom to know is joy unspeakable.

[53 : 46] Oh Lord help us to be ever more enraptured with your love, ever more caught up with you and who you are in your Son, the Lord Jesus, that we may never be diverted, as it were, in our attention towards those things which are false and fake and empty and foolish.

Oh Lord we pray, open our hearts and open our lives and make us to be those who are devoted to you. For we thank you that you have been and always will be devoted to us.

The evidence is in your Son, the proof and the reality we experience day by day and we look for that day when we shall be free from all sin and all emptiness, when we shall know you as you are truly known, when we shall see you in your glory.

Keep us faithful to that day going forward for we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.