

BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study

Sermon: “No Graven Images” (from the “Written in Stone” sermon series)

Scripture: Exodus 20:4-6

Key take-aways from the Scripture

- In this section of the Book of Exodus, we are continuing with the Ten Commandments given to Moses by God. In verses 4-6 of chapter 20, the commandments deal with idolatry and worshipping idols above God. These commandments demand that the Israelites worship and praise God without the distraction of idols, imagery, or anything created by humans to replace God (or worshipping images of God). In other words, worshipping God was to be *spiritual* and not *material*.
- Beginning with verse 4, we read: “You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above or that is on 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, punishing children for the iniquity of parents to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.”
 - Verse 4 is not restricting artwork but is warning against cultic practices of worshipping idols. It is a warning against representing something as the image of God and a sense of power that this might yield.
- In verses 5-6, God is portrayed as a “jealous God” and will punish the “third and fourth generation of those who reject me.” Since it was not uncommon for the third and fourth generation to live within the same household in antiquity, this verse likely refers to punishment for the current household unit and not those yet to be born. Further, the Hebrew word for jealous also refers to “zeal”, “fanatical” and “possessive.” However, verse 6 then tells us that God will show “steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.” It is interesting to also see that Deuteronomy 7:9, discusses how God “...maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations....” This is a love that knows no bounds! (See Numbers 14:18; Psalm 33:5; 57:10; 69:17; 100:5; 145:8; and Jeremiah 33:11).

Key take-aways from the Sermon

- Many of us struggle with instructions or directions in life...we sometimes deviate from the prescribed way and want to proceed with our way of doing things. When all else fails, stop doing *all else!!!*
- Exodus 20 contains God's instructions for Israel. Following these instructions is the required response with those whom God has delivered and made a covenant with.
- The first commandment (or rule number one in this new year series) is "You shall have no other gods before me." In other words, this tribe of newly freed slaves is to organize itself around a single-minded devotion. It means to will one thing and be undivided in their loyalty.
 - "A *double-minded* man is unstable in all his ways." James 1:8.
- In relation to our faith, we are intentionally Theo-centric: undivided and God-centered. One of our core values as a church is that we are "Christ-centered," so that every facet of our life together is to be mobilized with Jesus as our center.
- Rule number two of the new year is this (the second commandment): "You shall not make idols."
- In the Hebrew language, the word for idol is *pesel* which means "carved." The ancient Egyptian culture was polytheistic and had over 2,000 gods (with many carvings made of them). The ancient Israelites, who were enslaved by the Egyptians, were immersed in this culture and the instruction of God is that there will be no graven images.
 - These images were seen by the Hebrews to localize or domesticate God (or to bring God under my control). God will not be confined by any form or image that we invent.
- There was a sermon from Moses in Deuteronomy 4 to remind the people why this rule was given (see Deuteronomy 4:15-31). However, this was the first commandment that was broken by the ancient Israelites in Exodus 32 (the golden calf).
- As Paul taught in the New Testament, we tend to worship the creature rather than the creator. When we do, what we build with our lives bears no resemblance to the picture in the Book.
- Idolatry is simply worshipping anything that ought to be used and using anything that ought to be worshiped.
- When all else fails, stop doing all else...read the *instructions* and ask God to write it in your heart. The Word will become flesh in you!

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- Read John 4:24. How does this verse compliment what we read in Exodus 20:4-6?
- Why does God demand loyalty from us? How do these verses in Exodus 20 help us to understand, and maintain, this loyalty?
- What is “idolatry”?
- What “idols” do you turn to instead of turning to God? How do these “idols” distract you from your call as a disciple? How can you fix this?
- What does it mean to be a “Christ-centered” church? How do we live this out?
- How does the covenant of baptism help us with keeping God’s commandments?



NOTES

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