

A God Above All Others

Isaiah 45:21-23

Introduction

Thursday morning, while at Gold's Gym, hours before news broke of Israel's attack on Iran (ironically named "Rising Lion"), my thoughts were consumed by the crazy protests in Los Angeles and the posturing of California's governor and our President against one another. I also thought about the fragile state of our world, Putin's unrelenting push to take Ukraine and Ukraine's resolve to remain a sovereign state. While on the Stair Climber at Gold's gym, as I thought about the above current events, I typed the following on my "Notes" app on my phone: "The kings of the earth will mourn when Jesus returns because they do not want to give up what belongs to the King of kings."

We are promised by God's Word: **"Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him."** Of His return to judge the nations, Jesus said: **"And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the son of man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory"** (Matt. 24:30). When Jesus comes again, He will come with "power" and "great glory."

Jesus is coming, He will judge the nations, and He will come with power and great glory! I do not know when He will come and neither do you, but what I do know is that time is running out! My dear brothers and sisters, the hour is late and His coming draws nigh (Luke 21:25-28)! It is possible that you are here or watching the livestream, and as you do... you are still sleeping. Men, it is possible that you are here, or you are watching the live stream, and you are currently suffering from an identity crisis. Permit me to explain what I mean.

After God created all things, on the sixth day, He created man; more specifically, we are told that He said, **"Let Us make mankind in Our image according to Our likeness..."** (Gen. 1:26). We are later told in Genesis that God put Adam in the Garden and before He formed Eve from His rib, God commissioned Adam as the first man to **"cultivate it and tend it"** (2:15). God also said of Adam as a man, **"It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him"** (v. 20). The man and the woman were to complement each other, but the man was also responsible to cultivate and tend to his wife, or as the apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:25, Adam was to love his wife in such a way that would later be demonstrated upon a cross by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

God Created You to Know and Enjoy Him (vv. 18-21)

Adam and Eve were to serve as His ambassadors in His creation; Adam was to serve as priest in his home in the way that he loved his wife and eventually parented his children alongside and with his wife. All that was good in Adam's home and the peace that he and his wife knew in the presence of God was vandalized by the first couple's sin and Adam's failure to shepherd his wife

as a lover of her soul. The serpent sought to destroy God's image bearers bypassing Adam while targeting Eve. Although Adam was right next to his wife while the serpent tempted and deceived her, the man did not provide, nor did he protect by refusing to protest the lies of the snake on behalf of his wife. Eve believed the wicked serpent and ate of the fruit that God warned would bring death, and after Eve took the first bite, she then gave it to her husband, and he ate of the forbidden fruit. Both Adam and Eve were then filled with shame.

I would like to suggest to you that I believe Adam bit into the fruit because he wanted glory and power that did not belong to him. In fact, ever since Adam and Eve bit into the forbidden fruit, mankind has pursued a glory and a power that belongs only to the Creator. I would like to suggest that the underlying motive of idol worship in whatever form it takes is a desire for power and glory.

What do I mean by "power and glory," and how do they relate to idol worship? What I mean by power is chasing after the thing, person, or experience that God has said you cannot have or that you cannot have on your terms, but on His. In the garden, God said no to the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but He provided every other fruit in the garden for their enjoyment. Another example of how idol worship is really a pursuit of power is determining that you will go outside of God's prescribed moral boundaries so that you can get, receive, or experience what you think is best for you. When you do that, you make yourself to be "like" God in the same way Adam and Eve desired to be like God when they ignored His word to receive what they believed was best for themselves. This is the point of Isaiah 45:18-21; for a moment let verse 18 settle on your soul: **"For this is what the LORD says, He who created the heavens (He is the God who formed the earth and made it, He established it and did not create it as a waste place, but formed it to be inhabited): 'I am the LORD, and there is no one else.'"** In other words: There is only one Creator, He is Yahweh, and you are not Him. His creation that He made was designed with your living and thriving in mind within the way that He designed all of it. When you make decisions or act in such a way that goes against what Yahweh has declared to be good or bad, you assume an authority that is not yours. Idol worship is assuming the role of Yahweh and the power to determine what is right and wrong, apart from Him.

What I mean by "glory" is by making yourself the center of Yahweh's creation. By default, because He was able to create all things, He is God. There was no one before Him and before all things, He existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Not three different forms at different times, not by three different titles, but as One God in Three Persons. There is no God like Him! The good news is that He is equally holy as He is good. He is not like the idols we humans create that can only burden and crush those who worship them. However, when we do bow down to idols, we do so because we have determined that they can give us what God cannot. Anytime we make something ultimate in our lives (even the good things), we essentially have determined that the thing, the person, the experience, can give us what God cannot give. When we do this, we become guilty of self-worship and have removed God from His rightful place in our lives and placed ourselves at the center of His universe.

Listen, just as it is true that any idol you create is a god of your own creation that you must carry that will only burden you... so it is true that any idol you create and bow down to is self-worship.

To do this is no different than those, **“Who carry around their wooden idol and pray to a god who cannot save”** (Isa. 45:20). Your idols will lead you away from the life and joy the true God intends for you, not to it! This is why in Isaiah 45:21, Yahweh calls to all under the crushing burden of their idols: **“Declare and present your case; indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this long ago? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me.”** His call is one of mercy and grace that is motivated by love, but He will not share your heart with any of your idols!

God Provided a Way to Know and Enjoy Him (vv. 22-25)

There is a way to be free of your idols, there is a way that leads to life, there is a way to experience the kind of joy for which you were born, but it cannot be in and through any idol of your making! This is why the Bible says, **“There is a way which seems right to a person, but its end is the way of death”** (Prov. 16:25). Any way that you seek, that excludes God, to find and experience life, joy, your best life now... can only and will only lead to death because the kind of life and purpose you were born for can only be found in the One to Whom there is no comparison. The God who made you, calls to you: **“Turn to Me and be saved...”** (v. 22). Who can turn to Yahweh to be saved? God tells us: **“...all the ends of the earth.”** On every continent and in every nation, God invites all to turn to Him for their salvation, and it must be on His terms alone!

You cannot come to Yahweh for salvation with your idols, for the only way to come to Him is by first laying your idols down before Him. We learn from Isaiah 45:19, that He is not far off and He is not hidden. He is within reach because He alone is God and there is no other like Him! In Isaiah 45 alone, it is repeated not twice, not three times, not even seven times, but ten times that there is no God like Yahweh. Why is this repeated ten times? There are 10 commandments that were given to Israel; the number ten symbolizes the divine law and the God who created mankind to know Him. It is this God who not only has made Himself available to you and has invited you into a relationship with Him, but it is He who has pursued sinners who do not run to Him but from Him. It is this God and no other who declares with the same power and glory that spoke creation into existence with just the word of His mouth: **“I have sworn by Myself; the word had gone out from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, and every tongue will swear allegiance”** (v. 23).

What does it mean to bow one knee and what does it mean for one to swear allegiance to Yahweh? It means to come to Him in humility, contrite in spirit, and trembling at His word.

1. To tremble at God's word is to recognize that He is God and you are not, and that you have nothing to give Him but your broken self; to tremble at God's word is also to come to Him as one who is poor in spirit.
2. To be contrite in spirit is to not only recognize and see your sin for what it is, but to grieve over your sin; to be contrite in spirit is also to be one who mourns over your sin.
3. To be humble before God is to recognize that to Him alone belongs all glory, honor and power (see Rev. 4:11); to be humble is to be meek.

We are all born into sin, and because of our sin nature... our hearts are idol factories from the moment we come out of the womb and take our first breath. The verdict according to the Word of God is this: **“There is no righteous person, not even one; there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks out God...”** (Rom. 3:10-11; Ps. 14:1-3). However, God offers peace, and His offer of peace is not to be confused with an offer of truce. A truce is an agreement between enemies to stop fighting or arguing for a season and it usually requires a compromise on both sides; this is NOT what Yahweh offers to anyone. What he offers is the unconditional surrender of sinners so that we can be saved from His wrath and experience a redemption only He can make possible: **“Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself; the word had gone out from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, and every tongue will swear allegiance”** (Isa. 45:22-23). Why? Because **“only in Yahweh are righteousness and strength”** (v. 24).

What Adam failed to do while the serpent tempted his wife, was to lead her away from the danger of the serpent to the safety of their Creator who alone is all powerful and to Whom belongs all glory. Adam was called to tend and cultivate the heart and soul of his wife by leading her to Yahweh, but instead he led her to an enemy and to idols that can only, **“steal, kill, and destroy”** (John 10:10).

After Adam and Eve sinned, God promised a deliverer who would crush the serpent’s head, but also would ultimately rid the world of idols. Eight chapters later, in Isaiah 53, we discover that God’s terms of peace is a Person who would take upon Himself the sins we are all guilty of for the purpose of saving and redeeming sinners. This Person would be afflicted, struck down, and humiliated (Isa. 53:4). This Person would be pierced for our offenses, He would be crushed for our sins, He would be punished for good, and it would be through His wounded body, that sinners like us would find our healing (v. 5). This Person would bear the sins of Adam’s race by being oppressed, afflicted, and ultimately crushed for the forgiveness of sins we committed for the purpose of our redemption (vv. 6-10).

It would be through this Person that salvation would be made available to all people from every tribe, nation, and tongue. The Person Isaiah prophesied about would not be any ordinary person, for over 100 years after Isaiah wrote those words, the prophet Jeremiah declared: **“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord, ‘When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will live securely; and this is His name by which He will be called, ‘The LORD Our Righteousness.’”** (Jer. 23:5-6). The person Jeremiah spoke of is Jesus. He is the righteous Branch of David and He is **“The LORD our Righteousness”** who was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our wrongdoings, and died for our sins. He not only died, but after He was buried, He rose on the third day! What motivates Yahweh to offer salvation to sinners everywhere? Love!

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Rom. 5:8-10)

Of this Jesus, the apostle Paul wrote the following:

And being found in appearance as a man, He [Jesus] humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death: death on a cross. For this reason also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:8-11)

Do you see and understand what the apostle is saying here? The One through Whom salvation will be made available to the nations and deliver us from our sins and rescue us from the crushing and weary weight of our idols is Jesus! It is to Him that every knee will bow, and every tongue will swear allegiance by confessing, **“Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”**

Husbands, fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and every person in this room today... hear me: We are not called to chase after idols, for they will only lead to burdens that crush and ultimately steal, kill, and destroy. Every part of you was made for a purpose to know and be known by the living God whose image you bear! God’s terms of peace is Jesus, so if you have not done so already, run to Him before your time runs out.

Husbands, fathers, and grandfathers, do not fall for the tempter’s lies like a fool; do not follow in the way of Adam! The most loving thing you can do for your wife, your children, and your grandchildren is NOT to lead them to their idols, but to lead them to the idol crusher, Whom is Jesus Christ. There is coming a day when the time God has allotted will run out, and every idol worshiper will one day stand before the King of kings and Lord of lords. If you are leading your wife, your children, or your grandchildren to their idols... you are ultimately leading them to God as a Judge instead of a Father they could have known had you led them to Jesus instead of the idols of their hearts. For it is only in and through Jesus we can sing these words:

No fate I dread, I know I am forgiven
The future sure, the price, it has been paid
For Jesus bled and suffered for my pardon
And he was raised to over - throw the grave
To this I hold: my sin has been defeated
Jesus now and ever is my plea
Oh the chains are released, I can sing: I am free!
Yet not I but through Christ in me

Amen.