

The God Who We Can't Imagine

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. My name is Kyle. I've been privileged to be able to come up here a few times and teach through the Word, through the Bible with you guys.
- We are in the middle of a series within a series looking at the Ten Commandments. So I'm going to invite you to turn to Exodus chapter 20 and we'll look at another one of the commandments.
- We're just getting rolling with this series. A couple weeks ago, Dave spoke on kind of the Ten Commandments as a whole, how to read them, how to understand them, their purpose. Not only in the context they were originally delivered in to ancient Israel, but also to us.
- And last week together we looked at the first commandment. So we're going to look at the second commandment today and that's in Exodus chapter 20 verses 4 to 6. So let's read that together.
- That's the second commandment.
- [1 : 2 1] Now, if you were here last week, you might be looking at this one and say, well, last week we talked about idolatry and this, it kind of looks like we're talking about idolatry again. It's pretty much the exact same thing.
- And to a point, you're right that the first and the second commandment are really linked together. They're talking about a lot of the same things. And the reason that is, is because it's a very important subject.
- If we, if we get these first two commandments right, then I think that everything else in following God lines up very nicely. This idea of placing God in the right place in our life.
- That said, the second commandment is actually a little bit distinct. There's a certain degree of separation between the first and the second commandment.
- And put it this way, the first commandment is talking about placing other gods before God. And the second commandment is talking about making false images of God.
- [2 : 1 7] See, trying to worship the God of the Bible, but doing it in a way that, in an image that isn't, doesn't line up with the truth. It doesn't line up with who he actually is. It's a prohibition about making an image of God, about imaging God.
- What do I mean by that? What is imaging? Well, imaging is, we are not supposed to make an image of God and worship that image as if it is God. We actually have a great example of this a few chapters later that we'll probably get to sometime in this series.
- But in chapter 32, we have a picture of the nation of Israel when Moses is still up on the mountain, making an image of God by melting down all of their gold and making it into a molten calf, a golden calf.
- Now, like I said, I think we'll eventually get there in the series, so I'm not going to spend too much time on it. But I do want us to look at what Aaron says when he introduces this calf to the nation of Israel.

I'll put it up on the screen, but you can see it in Exodus chapter 32. So what Aaron says is he introduces this new idol. He says, this is your God, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.

[3 : 30] This is your God, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. Do you see that? He isn't saying, this is a new God. We've had one God and he's brought us this far, but now he's gone or disappeared or we don't know what's happened to him.

So this is a new God. No, Aaron is saying, this calf represents your God. They haven't left Yahweh. They've just made a representation of him that they could see, that they could interact with.

And they continue to worship God, but they did it in a form, in the image of this idol. Do you see the difference between these two things? Now, of course, this was common at the time.

All the nations around Israel, including Egypt where they left and Canaan where they were going towards, they would have done this, made physical representations of their God. Well, why would they do that?

Lots of reasons. But the biggest reason, I think, is that they would want to have a physical representation there. I was watching an interview.

[4 : 29] Trust me, this doesn't seem like it will relate, but it relates. I was watching an interview with Tom Holland. Does anyone know who Tom Holland is? A few Marvel fans. So Tom Holland is the new actor playing Spider-Man.

And he was talking about acting as Spider-Man in the new Marvel movies. And there's so much secrecy around these movies that they don't even want their stars, particularly Tom, because apparently he has a proclivity for releasing secrets.

So they don't want him to know what's going on. So he shows up to the soundstage one day to act, and there's just a bunch of tennis balls in certain points. And these are the characters that he's supposed to interact with. And so he asked the director, well, who am I talking to?

Oh, Tom, it's a secret. We can't tell you that. What does he look like? Oh, if we told you, we would give away who it is, and it's a secret. Well, what does he sound like?

Tom, you just have to pretend there's something there. We can't tell you what it sounds like. It'll give it away, and it's a secret. And he goes on to say about how difficult it was to act in those situations, because he has no idea what he's responding to.

[5 : 29] He has no idea how to act, because he just sees this tennis ball that's going to, in CGI, become this monster or something like that. He didn't know what he was acting to, what he was reacting to, so he needed a lot more coaching, a lot more work on his part and on the part of the director to see what's going on.

And this makes sense, right? And the way that it relates to what we're talking about is this is why we have a drive sometimes to make an image of God, because we want to be able to see who we're reacting to.

Or who we are reacting to. We want to be able to physically see what's going on and understand this God. But the problem is, is that our images confuse as much as they clarify.

They obfuscate more than they reveal. We might have an image of God that shows us something about God, but it'll always cover up more than it shows.

Take the golden calf, for example. So the reason that I think Israel chose a calf was because it can give a picture of God's strength. There's this massive, completely solid gold calf, and it's a picture of the power of God.

[6 : 38] But does it show God's purity? Maybe a little bit in the purity of the gold, but not really. Does it show the adoptive love that God had for Israel that caused him to, even before he gave the commandments, say, you will be my people, that you will be a holy nation and a royal priesthood?

Does it show anything about the character of God at all? No, the idol doesn't do that. It shows God's power, and that's just about it. It covers everything else up. Any picture that you try to bow down to will always conceal more than it will reveal.

So if you're going to depict God, is he going to be smiling, or is he going to be frowning? You pretty much have those two options, unless you make some sort of hologram, but even then, every time you look at it, it's one or the other.

But if you have a picture of God smiling, doesn't that cover up the fact that he has a wrath and an anger against evil? And if you show a picture of him looking all angry with thunderbolts in his hand, doesn't that picture up his love and his compassion, cover up the picture of his love and of his compassion?

Any time that we try and depict God, we will always conceal more than we reveal. There's limitations in physical representations. Now, we don't really have a problem with that, because we don't have, in our culture, a common practice of making pictures of God and saying, this is the be-all and end-all of who God is.

[8 : 08] But this commandment actually goes deeper than that. What God is actually saying here is, you shall not imagine me. The word imagination and the word image, they're the same, the same word.

So when we think of an image, we're always thinking of a physical image. When we have an imagination of something, we're always picturing a physical image. And physical images on the flip side are always based on mental images.

So what God is saying here is, you must not imagine me to be whatever you want me to be, but rather you must let your imagination be regulated by the truth. You can't just picture me how you want to picture me, but you need to have those pictures, those understandings of who I am be regulated by the truth.

J.I. Packer, who was a professor at Regent College in Vancouver, he said this. He said, the second commandment means that any statement that begins, I like to think of God as, should never be trusted.

How many times do we think of this? Or do we say this? I like to think of God as, and we lay out our idea of God. But here the second commandment speaks against us.

[9 : 19] You have to be very careful when you do that. How are you thinking of God? Is it a way that actually lines up with who God really is? And that's what this whole commandment is about.

We live in a time when objective spiritual truth, objective moral truth, hard copy truth, capital T truth, truth that can't be manipulated, that it's in question a lot of times.

We don't understand the truth, whether you believe in it or not, is there. It's a concept that a lot of people don't even have of a truth that carries through in all circumstances.

And the second commandment is just about that. God is saying, do not worship me as you want me to be. Do not think of me as you want me to be. Worship me and think of me as I reveal myself to be, as I really am.

I want to give us a few examples of how we do this. These are common pictures of God. They're a little bit of characterizations, of caricatures. No one, I think, thinks of God exactly in these ways, but they're extended a little bit so we can see the truth in how we actually think of God.

[10 : 28] The images that we have in our mind are probably a little bit more subtle than these, but they're just as damaging. So let me give you a few. How about the cosmic drill sergeant? If I had more time and any art skills, I would have tried to draw these out, but you're left with just the words and maybe you can imagine them.

So what do I mean by the cosmic drill sergeant? This is the image of God as Zeus, just lying in wait for us to do something wrong so that he can catch us in a sin and he can punish us or he can do whatever. He's constantly keeping tabs on our missteps.

This God isn't loving at all. The Bible says love keeps no records of wrongs, but this God, he keeps record of all the wrongs. He has a really long list. In fact, this God often tries to make us sin.

Have you ever thought, oh, God was tempting me there. He was trying to see if I would get into that sin, if I would fall to that. God is tempting us in a sin. Why is this dangerous? Well, this God only inspires fear.

There's no sense of drawing us in with his love, with his compassion. There's no sense of forgiveness, of grace, or of mercy. On the opposite end of the scale, the hippie deity.

[11 : 39] This God is okay with everything. Now, maybe he doesn't endorse everything you do, but he has a curfew rule. Go and do whatever you want, and as long as you're back by midnight, we're all good. As long as you get back before the end, there's no problem.

This God seems to see that sin is okay, but it hurts us. That's why this is dangerous. There's no sense of the wrath of God against sin.

Remember last week we said that false gods, when we pursue them, they destroy us. There's no sense of that in this God. This God is just saying, sin is okay because all I care about is that you come back to me at the end of the day.

And no sense that it hurts us in the process. There's nothing driving us to righteousness. Remember this one, the Santa Claus God or the Oprah God. Everybody gets a new car. This is the God that's saying, as long as I'm a good little boy or girl, he'll give me whatever I want.

God is just there to bless me. After all, this is what the Bible says, isn't it? The Bible says, all things work out for the good of those who love me. That's Romans 8.28. That's scripture.

[12 : 50] Or Philippians 4.19. My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ. This is another dangerous false image of God.

Because what happens if things don't work out as you think that they should? We've talked about that a few times already in the book of Exodus. If your needs or your wants, sometimes we can't always tell the difference between the two, aren't provided for you, one of two things happen.

Either if you eat yourself up saying, well, I just must not be good enough for my Santa Claus God to give me what I want. And that's why he's giving me coals because I'm just not a good little boy or girl and I've got to try harder.

Or we just throw away the God completely. We say, God is supposed to provide what I need and I didn't get that job, therefore God doesn't exist.

Well, maybe we're just imagining God wrong. Maybe it's more complex than we think. Maybe what we need is not that job, but the growth that will happen or the idle uprooting that will happen if we don't get it.

[13 : 54] But that's a whole other sermon and something we'll touch on a little bit later too. Here's another one, the force. God is just out there.

I know God exists, but I've given up having any kind of personal relationship with him. He's not a personal being. He just exists. You never really know where he is, what he's doing.

He's not really involved in my life, at least not personally. I can't actually know him. Why is this dangerous? A God with no personhood can't love you, can't fill you.

You can't worship him. Last one I'll talk about, the boomerang God. If you throw love my way, you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours.

Whatever I do comes back to me. This is the God that we make a deal with, and he gives us stuff. God, if you are out there, let me get into this university program that I've really been wanting to get into.

[14 : 54] And if you do that, I'm going to read my Bible every day this week. God, if you make Sally fall in love with me and want to get married, then I won't fall asleep in the sermon next Sunday.

I think that's the second week in a row that I've talked about falling asleep in the sermon. I'm getting a little self-conscious, I think. Nobody's asleep yet. Just the comfy chairs.

Why is this dangerous? Worship is not a barter system. Can you imagine this working in your marriage? Your wife says, honey, I love you. Oh, that's sweet.

Pass the salt and I'll tell you I love you too. That's not love. That's not how relationships work. I think that response is a good way to get assaulted. I'm sorry.

Again, I recognize these are just caricatures. Nobody actually thinks like these. But there are roots of these different false images of God in our lives. And they are destroying us.

[16 : 01] Well, how? How are they destroying us? How are they destructive? Let's look at a few ways that these false images are destructive. First, our passion is poisoned.

Our passion is poisoned. Quite a few years ago, actually. I thought it was just a few, but it was like a decade ago. I was going to McDonald's with my brother-in-law. And we went through the drive-thru.

And this was before all the boards were digital. So all of the different burgers have their little picture. And you order which one you want. And all the pictures were new and fresh except for the Filet-O-Fish one.

Now, I don't know why people order Filet-O-Fish anyway. I wasn't going to. But I certainly wasn't going to order Filet-O-Fish at this restaurant because that picture must have been 25 years old. And it was greened and moldy.

And it looked like the most disgusting thing in the world. Not only did I not want to order Filet-O-Fish, but I almost didn't order anything at all there. And that's what happens when we have a bad image of something.

[17 : 02] So if we have a false image of God, something that doesn't reflect His majesty, something that doesn't reflect His overwhelming love, something that doesn't reflect who He truly is, it affects our image.

It affects our passion for God because we don't see Him as He is. He doesn't draw us in in the way that the true God does because we have made the image not reflect who He really is.

And it poisons our passion. The true God is compelling. He draws us in. When we see His glory, we are driven to worship Him. His justice, His compassion, His love, it drives us to worship.

But when we make a false image of Him, it ends up looking like that Filet-O-Fish picture. And it destroys any appetite, any passion, any desire we have for Him. That means then that our worship is wonky.

Most of these images are deficient in filling us. So for example, if we have an image of God that lacks love or acceptance, we're going to want to find that somewhere else. If we think that we have to win God's favor before He loves us, we're going to have to find our love and our acceptance somewhere else.

[18 : 18] So we're either going to look to someplace illicit to find it, casting ourselves into sin and throwing away our worship completely, or we're going to look to something created to fill that need, to fill that love.

And we're going to put the weight of God on our spouse or on our friends and saying, I don't, my false image of God tells me that God doesn't love me. I need somebody to love me like God can.

And so we put that on our spouse or our children or on our friends. And it's going to just, they're going to crush under that weight because we've directed the worship that is supposed to go to God to them.

Our faith is weakened. Every false image of God is weaker than the actual truth. Our faith is weakened when we, when our faith is built on a false assumption about what God is like.

If our false view of God emphasizes only God's power or his goodness, what happens when things go wrong? What happens when in the situation in our life, God doesn't look powerful or he doesn't look good?

[19 : 23] Because if he did, we would be, we wouldn't be experiencing what we're experiencing. I referred to this a minute ago, but a narrow or distorted view puts us in a situation where we come face to face with the realization that the God that we are believing in doesn't exist.

Okay? When we face trial and we believe in a God that doesn't let us go through trial, we're put in a situation where we realize that the God that we're believing in doesn't exist.

So we either will have to throw away that false image or we're going to throw away the baby with the bathwater and say, God doesn't exist. Not only the God that I've been believing in, but God as a whole because we identify that false image with who God really is.

You guys look a little bit confused what I mean. Let's put flesh on it for a minute. It's easy for us in our affluent Western culture to have a view of God like the cosmic Santa Claus. But if things are going sideways, we just got to hold on and make it through because God will work it out in the end.

Even if it means that some random person will give us a check at the end of the month so we can make our rent. No. We just have to have faith. Listen, God does work like that sometimes.

[20 : 32] I know lots of people have stories like that. I have stories like that of God working through his people to give us provision when we need it most. But what happens if that mystery check never comes and you lose your place?

Does that mean that God doesn't exist? See, if your false view of God says that that will never happen, then suddenly you're faced with the reality that that God doesn't exist.

But that God doesn't promise that we will always make our rent. He doesn't promise that we will always have everything that we need in that kind of way.

In Acts 12, there's a great story of the Apostle Peter in prison and the church is praying for him and God miraculously saves him and rescues him out of the prison. And we all look at that and we say, look at how God provides for us.

And he does. And he provides for his churches because Peter went from that moment to continue to preach the gospel and to spread the worship of God throughout the whole Roman Empire.

[21 : 34] But when we read that, sometimes we forget that a few pages before in our Bible, there's a story of John the Baptist in prison. And John was one of the first people to recognize Jesus for who he was.

And as Jesus was coming to be baptized by John, John said, here is the one you've been waiting for. This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. John knew who Jesus was.

But a few years later, when John's in prison, he begins to have doubts and he sends his disciples to go to Jesus and ask him, are you really the one that we were waiting for or should we be looking for someone else? In the face of suffering, he's beginning to have doubts.

And you know how Jesus responds to John's disciples? He references a prophecy in Isaiah about all the things that the Messiah would do. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.

When John hears this, he's going to recognize the one thing that the Messiah would do that was promised there that Jesus didn't say. And you know what that is? The captive will be set free.

[22 : 47] And John hears this and what he sees is he's like, yeah, Jesus is the promised Messiah. But that doesn't mean that I'm going to escape prison because that isn't part of God's plan right now.

And if John had that false image of God that we so often have that he will always come in and rescue us in the 11th hour from whatever we think that we're facing, then he would have lost his faith in him.

But he didn't because he saw that what God had promised was something much bigger, that what God was doing in the world wouldn't be stopped, and that death itself wouldn't be able to come between John and his Savior.

If we don't, if our picture of God isn't big enough to see that he will miraculously rescue Peter and not miraculously rescue John, if we don't have a big enough picture to see what God is doing, then we'll lose our faith in him because our faith never was in him.

It was in a false image of him. Our copy is compromised. Our identity is rooted in God. We're called to look like him, not only as Christians, but as humans.

[24 : 06] The book of Genesis talks about us being made in the image of God. That means we are to be like him. We're to look like him. Christians, it's additionally so because we are, for instance, we're baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

We're given an identity of belonging to God, and that identity is combined with a mission. That mission is to reflect God to others. We're supposed to point back to God, to be transformed into his image.

Basically, we're supposed to be a copy of him. But if we start with a false image, if we start with a distorted view of God, then our copy isn't going to actually point back to God. It's going to look wrong.

If we have the wrong image of him, we make a wrong copy. Our copy is compromised. A bad original always makes bad copies. And that means that our mission is going to be toxic.

If our copy is compromised, our mission is going to be toxic. Remember a couple weeks ago, we said that even before God gave the Ten Commandments, he gave Israel a mission to be a holy nation, a royal priesthood.

[25 : 08] A priest is someone who goes between God and man, and he shows humanity what God is like. And that was Israel's role. That's actually the role of the church, to show the world what God is like.

But if we're not copying him well, then that mission is going to be toxic. We end up reflecting the wrong image. Remember that Filet-O-Fish picture? That's how we would look to the rest of the world if we image God wrong.

Not something that draws them in, but something that turns them off. Are we angry all the time? Are we just judgmental? Do we care and reflect about our own sin and work against it?

Are we compassionate? Because if we aren't, we aren't reflecting the true image of God. We're either going to turn people away from him, make them sick to their stomach instead of craving him, or perhaps, maybe this is even worse, we're going to pass down the plague to them.

We're going to conform them to our false image. Here's what I mean by that, by pass down the plague. Maybe people aren't turned off by our witness. They become disciples of the same false image of God that we've been serving, that we've been projecting.

[26 : 15] Or maybe we have the opposite effect. We project God wrong in one way, so they react to that, and they see God wrong in a completely other way. There are many people in my generation who have a view of God that they can't reconcile at all with a wrath for sin, a wrath against evil.

And a large part of that is because they have learned from people who that's all God was. God was only a wrathful and vengeful God with no love, with no grace, and with no forgiveness.

And they reject that, and they come completely to the other side and see a God that doesn't fight against sin, that doesn't fight against evil, that doesn't have a wrath against our sin.

And that's because of the image that was projected. That plague is passed down from generation to generation. Our false view of God doesn't just affect us, it affects those who come after us, including our children.

And we see this actually written right in this commandment. And if you look in verse 5, God says, I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.

[27 : 32] So what does this mean? That my grandparents sinned once, and so now God is judging me for that sin? Elsewhere in the scripture, God promises not to judge someone for their father's sin.

What he's talking about here is that when we have a false image of God that gets passed down to others, and others experience the same destruction because they've adopted that or reacted against that false image.

So it's incumbent on us to have a proper view of God that we're passing down to others, otherwise other people will feel the same judgment against them because they will be destroyed by inheriting that false view of God.

Finally, we stir God's jealousy. We mentioned this last week, but did you see again in verse 5, it talks about God being a jealous God. We can think of this as a negative.

Jealousy is a negative characteristic, but it isn't really. Idolatry like we looked at last week and having a false image of God like we're looking at this week, they're destructive to us.

[28 : 35] And God doesn't want us to suffer through them. He's jealous of us serving Him because He knows that's what we're made for. He knows the only way that we experience true human life is in relationship with Him and honoring and glorifying Him.

And because of that, when we're holding false images of God, He will often put us in positions that will destroy those false images. One of the most confusing stories in the Bible for a lot of people is the story of Abraham and Isaac.

Are you guys familiar with that story? In case you're not, Abraham was a really old guy that didn't have any children. And God said, I'm going to bless you. I'm going to make you the grandfather of a huge nation.

And Abraham's like, I don't even have one kid, let alone a whole bunch of descendants. So God said, I'm going to give you and your wife a son in your advanced age. And it was a miracle.

He had a son named, and He named him Isaac. And God said, through Isaac, I'm going to make you a great nation. And not only that, but you are going to bless the whole world through this people.

[29 : 40] And then a few years later, as Isaac grows up, God comes to Abraham and He says, I want you to take Isaac up this mountain and I want you to sacrifice to him. And we look at that and say, man, this God is barbaric.

He's indulging in child sacrifice. Why is God calling Abraham to sacrifice Isaac? And what's happening, and we don't see it, is that God is making sure that Abraham sees that his hope is not found in the son of the promise, Isaac.

His hope is found in the God of the promise, the giver of the promise, God. He's making sure that Abraham doesn't have a false image of God.

He's making sure that his hope is truly in God, in the giver of the promise, and not just in the son of the promise. And so Abraham goes up and he demonstrates that he will give up Isaac.

And God never wanted him to give up Isaac. What he wanted to make sure was that Abraham wasn't looking to Isaac as his salvation, but he was looking to God as his salvation. Because if Abraham looked at Isaac and he said, you're my hope, you're my promise, he would have crushed him with expectation.

[30 : 51] He would have crushed him in his idea of what Isaac should be. But if his hope was in God, he would have let God bring his plan to fruition. Okay? It wasn't that God was petty.

It was that God wanted to make sure that a false image of him and his promise didn't take root in Abraham's heart. And there's similar ideas repeated in what Dave's been calling the case law that follows the Ten Commandments here.

Like in Exodus 23, if you turn a few pages, you don't have to. I think I'll put it up on the screen. But God's talking to the Israelites about moving into the promised land and what he wants when they go there.

And he says to them, do not bow down before the gods or worship them or follow their practice. You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces.

Worship the Lord your God and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you and none will miscarry or be barren in the land. I will give you a full lifespan.

[31 : 53] What's God saying in that? He's saying that Israel must be careful as they move into a new land. They must destroy the idols of the land. They didn't, by the way. Why did he command for them to destroy the idols?

Because God knew that Israel would be enticed to follow these idols if they didn't destroy them. They were enticed to follow them, by the way. They would be enticed because these idols were visible.

They could be interacted with. They could be understood. They could be controlled. But the problem is the gods that we can understand and control, they're not actually gods.

They're attractive, but they're useless and they're destructive. So God promised to bring calamity, to bring suffering to Israel if they turn to other gods. Why?

As punishment? Well, partly. But mostly because that trial, that suffering would show Israel that the gods that they had turned to were not actually gods that could save them, that they were useless.

[32 : 57] And these false views of the true God that they held were weak. And God would exercise his jealousy to turn Israel back to himself, not for God's sake, but for Israel's sake.

Because idolatry and false views of God are ultimately destructive for us. So what do we do? How do we avoid these false views of God?

How do we avoid these poor images? The only solution is we look to the true image of God. God says, don't make false images. We look to the true image.

We look to Jesus. The New Testament repeatedly talks about how Jesus is the actual, the true image of God, the full revelation of God. I'll give you a few verses that show this, but they're everywhere.

John 1.18, no one has ever seen God. The only God who is at the Father's side, he has made known to him. He has made him known. He, Jesus, has made him known. A little later in the book of John, Jesus says this to his disciples, anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

[34 : 04] The author of Hebrews says, he, Jesus, the radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of his nature. My favorite of these ones, Colossians 1.15.

He is the image, same word. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Jesus makes the invisible God visible.

You see, in Jesus, we see God perfectly. We see who he is. We also see in Jesus true humanity. So we see God as he is, but we also see humanity as we were created to be.

We see who we were called to be. If we're looking at Jesus, we'll have a proper image of God. And we see this in the life of Jesus.

You know what? Jesus interacted with many people, and nobody leaves the interaction with Jesus the same. When people met Jesus, they were confronted with the true image of God, and it either forced them to get rid of their false images of him, or it forced them to push away from the true image of God, and reinforce their false images.

[35 : 13] There's a saying, the same sun that melts the ice hardens the clay. The same sun that melts the ice hardens the clay.

And when we come face to face with Jesus, either our heart is melted and we tear away our false images, or we throw away God and we maintain our false images.

It's like when you bring two magnets together. I realize the irony of using an illustration about what God is like in a sermon about don't image what God is like. But I get away with it because I think I'm talking about the effect of God and not who God actually is.

But if you take two magnets, depending on their polarity, they will either push against each other or they will jump together. What won't happen is that they'll just not interact at all. And that's what happens when we encounter the true image of God in Jesus.

We're either going to push away from Him and reject God and say, no, this false image of God, I like that more, and that's what I'm going to say is reality to our own destruction. Or we're going to jump to God and throw away our false images and say, no, this is the true God that I worship.

[36 : 22] Let's look at one example quickly, very quickly. It's in Luke chapter 19. It's a story that we know mostly by a kid's song of God's interaction with a man named Zacchaeus.

And I'm sorry if that song is running through your head right now. Fight against it. If you're not familiar with this story, Zacchaeus was a Jewish person, but he was a tax collector, which means he was a traitor because he was working on behalf of the Romans.

It also means that he was a thief because he would take what Rome asked him to take and then take a lot more for himself. And we know this because he's described to live a lavish lifestyle and have lots of money.

And for everybody around him, he's seen as a traitor and as a sinner. He's one of the worst people to the good upstanding Jews. But he's desperate.

As Jesus comes to his town, he's desperate to see Jesus. And when Jesus comes to town, he climbs up on a tree to look over the crowd so that he can at least see and get a glimpse of Jesus. And this is what the Bible says happens.

[37 : 22] When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today. So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, he has gone to be the guest of a sinner.

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, look, Lord, here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.

Jesus said to him, today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham. For the son of man came to seek and save the lost. Do you see the false images being challenged?

The obvious one is the people around. They mutter. They're disdainful of what Jesus is doing. They see Jesus talking to Zacchaeus and say, well, I like to imagine that my God would never talk to a man like that.

In my mind, God doesn't talk to sinners and thieves and traitors and tax collectors. And they use their same, their false image to look down on really the true image of God.

[38 : 29] But how about Zacchaeus? It's hard to know exactly what his false image is because he's already beginning to change it in this passage before we even meet him. But it's likely that he held the same belief as those around him.

That God would have nothing to do with him. That he made his choice a long time ago to serve money and things and Rome instead of God.

And there was no way, whether he wanted to or not, that he could change that choice. There was no one doing that decision no matter how much he wanted to. That he had done far too much for God to ever accept him.

That all he'd earned is God's wrath. And that day he goes and he hopes just to get a glimpse of Jesus. He doesn't hope or dream that Jesus would ever interact with him. But in Jesus he sees something different.

Completely different. He saw a love. A love that covered the entire distance between a thieving tax collector and a sinless savior. A love that covered that gap completely.

[39 : 29] That didn't require Zacchaeus to repent and to give back his money and do all of that before God would love him. But he saw in Jesus a God that covered the entire gap between a thieving tax collector.

Between whoever we are and a sinless savior. Zacchaeus let the true image correct that false image of God. That he had and he changed.

See he didn't just say oh God's actually loving and switch to a new false image. But he saw the depth of who God really is. And said no God loves me and accepts me as I am.

And out of a response to that I'm going to stop what I'm doing. I'm going to make restitution. And I'm going to change in honor. In reflection of the love and the acceptance and the forgiveness that God has shown me.

It was a love that changed Zacchaeus and drove him to repentance. So how about us? The takeaway is this.

[40 : 34] We need to be encountering the true image of God. Because we are constantly going to put in false images of who God is. And we need to be seeing God's revelation of who he is through his son.

Through his word. Through his people. And through his spirit. We need to be seeking God's spirit to counter false images of him. That we have been worshiping. Rather than letting us be transformed by the full radiance of who God really is.

We need to encounter a God that is much greater than any God that we can imagine. And that's who we have. A God that loves us fully and completely. And draws us to him to be a part of what he's doing.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.