

Idolatry Will Make You Clueless

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Date: 15 November 2020

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[0 : 00] Let's begin with prayer as we prepare to hear God's Word to us this morning. Our God, our Father, we are grateful for your Word.

I pray, grant me strength as I preach it, strength to speak your Word well, to speak it clearly. Give us minds that retain it well. Give us eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to understand, so that we can take warning from your Word and we can turn to the only true Savior that we really have in an uncertain and confusing world, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen. Well, let me ask, when was the last time that you felt completely clueless? You just feel like you felt completely clueless in a situation.

When was the last time that you said to yourself, I just have no idea what's going on right now?

Maybe that's your experience whenever you turn on the news.

Maybe that's how you were feeling a little while ago if you're watching the live stream and you tried to use your computer to access it and you're like, I have no idea how this thing works. How do I even get there?

[1 : 17] And maybe you just, whenever you come to church, maybe you feel that way half the time when you're at church, confused and clueless. That last one might be a little bit embarrassing.

You know, it could be incredibly disorienting to call yourself a Christian and then to attend a church and then to realize that week after week, you're completely clueless when it comes to who God is, when it comes to what God made you for.

And if you've ever had such a disorienting experience, then where at times you feel clueless, at times you're not sure, at times you're confused, well then welcome to the ranks of many of the people in God's word, many of the people in the Bible.

God's word is filled with stories of people who encounter God. And then they find themselves when they encounter God, not only disoriented, but sometimes they find themselves clueless about who he is and clueless about what they are meant to do in response to God showing up.

And this is exactly what takes place in the book of Judges, in Judges chapter 13, which I read earlier in the worship service. So we're going to travel back in time, nearly 3,000 years, to see what's going on with God's people at that time.

[2 : 40] And here's a sneak preview. People back then, just the culture was so, so, so different, and yet deep in their hearts, people back then were not really that different from people today, from you and me.

What's happening with God's chosen nation of Israel is that God has brought them out of Egypt into the promised land of Canaan. But within a couple of generations, God's people have turned away from him.

They started worshiping other gods. And in chapter 2 of Judges, the author writes, the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals.

And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods from among the gods of the peoples who are around them, and bowed down to them.

And they provoked the Lord to anger. Now, it's easy to look down our nose at these clueless people, because we know there's, oh, you know, there's no such thing as gods like Baal and Asherah and Moloch and Dagon.

[3 : 47] I mean, right? We're so much smarter. The thing is, we bow down, figuratively speaking, before our own secularized versions of these gods.

We live to accumulate and preserve money or possessions. We live for sex or marriage or romance. We pursue power in the form of political victory or in the form of control, our sense of

control over our family or over our church.

Anything, any relationship, anything at all that makes us feel good or secure or fulfilled, anything can be refashioned, reshaped into an idol, even good things.

That's why the Apostle Paul had to warn the Christians of the Colossian church that idolatry can be seen wherever you have coveting, wherever you have excessive desire that's inappropriate or desire that just can't be satisfied.

You just need to have an RRSP that's just a little larger, a romance that's a little more exciting, a job that's a little more fulfilling. You need to get your family members to like you just a little bit more.

[5 : 03] You need grades that are just a little bit better. Your political party just needs a few more people in power. Your sports team just needs to win one more championship. You just need to lose one more pound.

Then, ah, everything's going to be fine. Then you're going to be happy. And that's how idolatry works. It's the worship of a counterfeit God. And it makes, it affects your mind.

It warps our minds. It makes you clueless. Many of these things are good things, things that God meant for us to enjoy. But our idolatrous hearts, our idol factory hearts, as John Calvin put it, they make these good things into ultimate things.

And these things were never meant to be ultimate things. They were never meant to give us what we are trying to get out of them. If you want to recognize an idol in your life, try thinking through a few diagnostic questions.

Given the choice, where do you spend most of your time? Where do you spend most of your time? Given the choice, where do you spend most of your money?

[6 : 13] When you let your mind wander, where does it wander to? Where does it end up? And where does it dwell on? Usually it gravitates towards the center of your affection and worship.

These idols, they may not be sources of happiness for you because idols end up, in the end, making you feel miserable and enslaved. The Israelites, do you think they just served other gods because it was a fun thing to do?

It was not. For example, the god Moloch demanded that they sacrifice their children. No parent wants that. But what happened is that the people of Israel, they were in a place where they felt vulnerable.

The world was confusing and disorienting. The world was changing so rapidly. They felt helpless. They're in a new land at the mercy of their enemies. How do we feed our family in famines and droughts?

And so they looked around at the people around them. They looked at the Canaanites who seemed to know what they were doing. They saw how these Canaanites were worshiping the other gods.

And the people of Israel bought into that value system.

[7 : 19] They started to copy their neighbors because the worship of other gods, it just felt so plausible. It felt so real. And sometimes it even seemed to work. They would rather trust something that felt real and concrete, something that they could put their hands on like an idol, than a god that they couldn't see or feel or touch.

It's a lot easier to place your faith in your visible bank statement than in an invisible god. So in the book of Judges, the Lord's people turn away from him and turn toward these idols.

And here's what he tells them in Judges chapter 10, verse 14. He finally just says to them, go and cry out to the gods whom you've chosen. Let them save you in the time of your distress.

And of course, these gods couldn't do it. And so we have this downward spiral in the book of Judges, this cycle that repeats again and again and gets worse every time. The Israelites would worship idols.

They'd be overrun by enemy armies. They'd cry out to the Lord for help. The Lord would raise up a hero that we call a judge to deliver them.

[8 : 31] And then the people would have peace for a generation. And then after a generation had passed, they would throw themselves into idolatry again. And the cycle repeats. And in each cycle, the idolatry grew worse.

And this downward spiral that takes place over the entire book of Judges, it has a bad effect on Israel. It's the same effect that idolatry has on you and me. Here's what it is. Idolatry makes you clueless about the Lord and His purpose for us.

Idolatry makes you clueless about the Lord and about His purpose for us. Let's start at Judges 13, verse 1, because here we're going to see the cycle begin once again.

And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for 40 years. Now, what sort of evil were they doing?

There's a lot of evil things people can do. But this phrase, what was evil, in the book of Judges, it refers to something specific. We saw a little earlier when we read about the idol worship, that's where that phrase first shows up.

[9 : 46] The ultimate evil, what was evil, is this worship of idols. It is to push God off His throne, to replace Him with another object of your affection. That's why the Ten Commandments begins with, you have to worship the Lord your God, serve Him only.

You shall not make idols for yourselves. Because the moment you start doing that, all the other commandments fall apart. We break them all. So what does God do? Does God throw His hands up in the air and just give up?

I've had it with this people. He doesn't. God is so much more gracious than that. We read, the Lord, here's what the Lord does. The Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for 40 years.

Now that might seem like a bad thing, but it's actually a gracious thing because that gives the people the opportunity to move to the next stage in the cycle, to cry out to the Lord for help as they are under His discipline.

But here in chapter 13, something finally breaks. Something happened that's different. Something that has not happened yet in the book of Judges. The Israelites don't cry out for help.

[10 : 56] It's missing. They've simply accepted the Philistine rule. They see no reason to rock the boat. And they've lost sight of the reason that God brought them into the promised land to live as a nation set apart for Himself.

They've lost sight of God Himself. What happens to the Lord's people when we serve our own idols rather than setting ourselves apart from the Lord? Well, we forget who the Lord is and we forget who we are, what we are made for.

It's like forgetting your own name and forgetting the name of your closest friend. And idolatry makes you clueless about the Lord and His purpose for us.

So let's start about, let's talk about that second part of the statement first. Here's what idolatry does. It makes us clueless about the Lord's purpose for us. If you and I devote ourselves to idols instead of the Lord, you will no longer recognize the Lord's purpose for us.

You will no longer recognize the Lord's purpose for us. It will seem foreign and unfamiliar and incomprehensible to you. What's your life about? What are you even doing here?

[12 : 09] What are you living for? Why aren't things turning out the way that you expected? Does the Lord have any good in store for you in a world in which your life is upended?

These are questions that run through your mind when you've lost sight of, when you no longer recognize the Lord's purpose for you and for our church. Here's what our purpose is.

It is absolute exclusive devotion to the Lord. It is absolute exclusive devotion to the Lord. That's why we read in Ecclesiastes chapter 12, verse 13, the end of the matter, all has been heard.

Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man. That's what we were made for. Our purpose is absolute, exclusive devotion to the Lord, to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

And when you don't realize that this is the Lord's purpose for us, you will overlook the Lord's demand for devotion. You will overlook the Lord's demand for devotion. And the Lord is right to demand this of you.

[13 : 21] And it is wrong of you to overlook his demand. We can see this play out in Judges chapter 13. As Manoah and his wife, they no longer recognize the Lord's purpose for Israel.

They no longer see the Lord's purpose for themselves. And you see it especially in verses 2 through 7. To give a couple of background details that are going to make sense of this story, first of all, being a woman in that culture who was barren, that was a horrible thing in that culture.

If you know any couples who struggle with infertility, you know that is a hard and painful thing to endure that despair day after day after day.

Now take that pain, multiply it by 10 for Israelite culture because back then, keeping the family line going, that was everything. That was everything. That was everything.

If you didn't have any descendants, you essentially had failed your family, you had failed your clan, you were a person without a future. Bearing children was crucial, and a woman who was barren was considered a shameful failure.

[14 : 35] In fact, the Lord said back in the book of Deuteronomy that if the people of Israel rejected him, one of the many curses that would fall on them under that old covenant would be the curse of barrenness.

And that's actually what might be happening here. Manoah and his wife might be enduring one of the covenant curses towards a disobedient people. And so the angel's news in verse three, it is an incredible promise of hope.

The angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, Behold, you are barren and have not born children, but you shall conceive and bear a son.

But this son comes with a set of instructions. Essentially, the child is going to become a Nazarite. The Nazarite vow is explained in Numbers chapter six. The idea is that Israelite men and women could make a vow to separate themselves to the Lord.

And anyone who took the Nazarite vow, there were a few rules there. You couldn't eat or drink anything made from grapes, especially wine. You couldn't cut your hair.

[15 : 45] You had to have COVID hair, I guess. And you couldn't go near a dead body, even if it were the body of a family member. This was a way the people of Israelite could express their total and exclusive devotion to their God if they wanted to go that extra mile and show, I am dedicated to the Lord.

You could take the Nazarite vow. It would separate you from the usual customs of your culture, participating in funerals, drinking wine at feasts, having fantastic looking hair. So, what the angel of the Lord is telling the woman is that her son is going to be a Nazarite.

He is going to be separated to the Lord. But in this case, it's not just a temporary vow that lasts for a little while. In verse five, the angel says, the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb.

So, this means that not only the child, but the mother must also follow the Nazarite restrictions while she is pregnant. And this devotion to the Lord, it really ought to remind her and ought to remind us of the failure of Israel to be devoted to the Lord because God chose Israel to be his treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

But in the book of Judges, the people have, once again, they have turned away from the Lord. They have served the gods of the Canaanites whom they live among. And there is no sense of a Nazarite mindset among the people.

[17 : 08] They don't see themselves as set apart for the Lord. They see themselves as free agents. Just serving whatever God they feel like, whatever God makes the most sense to them in the moment. Now, anyone sitting here who is a believer in Jesus Christ, you also are a part of God's people.

Anyone watching this who's a believer in Jesus Christ, you're a part of God's people. This means that you too are set apart. But we forget this, don't we?

It's easy to forget that. Do you see yourself as someone whom the Lord has chosen for himself? If he saved you, then he set you apart for himself before you were ever born.

He did this so that you may be devoted to him only and not devoted to the idols of the people surrounding you, devoted to him exclusively. And the longer that you follow these idols, the longer you run after all the things that your neighbors and your friends who are not believers run after and pursue and devote themselves to, the more you do that, the more your identity as a chosen child of God is going to erode until you no longer have the mindset that you belong to him alone.

God becomes just an a la carte menu offering that you can order at your convenience. He's one of many options to select from in order to live a happy life.

[18 : 35] You can pick and choose what you want to believe. You can pick and choose who you want to follow. You can pick and choose when you're going to obey him. When this happens, you will be sidetracked by secondary concerns.

You'll be sidetracked by secondary concerns. That's what happens to Manoah and his wife as we continue through the story. They lose sight.

They lose focus on what's important. The angel of the Lord has appeared to Manoah's wife. He's explained to her that her child will be a Nazarite, that he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.

That's the last time that phrase is going to be used in this chapter. He shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines. They lose sight of that immediately. The thing is, Manoah was never there for any of this conversation.

And we're about to see a game of telephone unfold, you know, where one person hears a report and then they report it to somebody else, but the report changes a little bit. Verses 6 and 7.

[19 : 35] The woman came and told her husband, A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. I did not ask him where he was from, and he did not tell me his name, but he said to me, Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son.

So then, drink no wine or strong drink, eat nothing unclean, for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death. So the angel gave Manoah's wife a message, and it's significant that he appeared to her rather than to Manoah himself.

Now she is relaying it secondhand to her husband, but just like any game of telephone, she leaves out a few things and adds a few things to the story. One of the most important things that gets left out is the child's purpose.

The most important thing. Remember that the angel of the Lord said he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines. Verses 6 and 7, does she mention that to her husband?

No, it's missing. And we see throughout the rest of this chapter that Manoah seems to get, there is something significant and important about this child, but he's very confused about what his son's purpose is supposed to be.

[20 : 53] He's going to try to figure it out, but his every attempt is blocked. Things don't play out the way Manoah wants them to. He prays to the Lord for help in verse 8.

The Lord listens to his prayer, but he doesn't respond in the way that Manoah wants him to.

Manoah wants the angel to appear to us. The angel does not appear to him, but to his wife.

As head of the household, it's got to be a little bit embarrassing, a little bit humbling to have your wife run in and say, he appeared to me again, and then you've got to follow your wife out into the field to find this angel.

And then when you ask the angel, what is to be the child's manner of life? What is his mission? In verse 12, the angel doesn't answer that question. The angel only says, hey, here's what your wife is supposed to do in preparation.

She is to follow the stipulations of the Nazarite vow. Now, why does the angel not answer Manoah's questions? Why does he not respond to Manoah the way he wants him to?

[22 : 02] I would put before you it's because Manoah is jumping ahead. He is asking the wrong question because he should be concerned with something first. Manoah is wanting to get going on this child's mission.

He's wanting to know how do, what's the mission? How do I equip my child for that? But the angel is more interested in what's happening in the here and now. Is the child's mother going to be fulfilling this Nazarite vow so that the child will be devoted to the Lord right from the womb?

That's key. If you can't even get step one right, what's the point of the rest of the mission anyway? If you're not fully and exclusively devoted to the Lord from the get-go, what's the point of figuring out anything else?

Manoah is like a runner who's worrying about how he's going to run and finish a marathon race and he hasn't even bothered entering the race yet. He's thinking way too far ahead and that's the problem with Israel too.

They didn't see the need to be set apart to the Lord and loyal to him alone. They tried to figure out their purpose without that. They didn't understand that by pursuing other gods, by letting their relationship with God be contaminated with competing idols, they were eroding their very identity, they were undermining their very mission, their very purpose.

[23 : 25] They were undermining the reason for their very existence. Let's think about how this affects us too as a church. You and I, all of us together, we face temptation to be sidetracked by secondary concerns.

We can be really focused on trying to run and fulfill some sort of mission, like how can we be the church that in Squamish is known as having the best stage and backdrop, as good as it is?

How can we be known as the church that has a great music experience or entertaining preaching that just draws people in? How do we become known as the church with the best children's programs, the most exciting youth group?

And we're running ahead and forgetting that first, we want to be known as a church where the spirit of the Lord is present in power, where we are being filled with the fullness of Christ and maturing in Christ, where his people are holy, where their lives are dedicated entirely to him first.

Which of these is the foundation? Which of these has to be laid first? It is our exclusive devotion to the Lord that has to be there or otherwise everything else gets thrown off.

[24 : 49] Otherwise, we're building a building without a foundation. salvation. Otherwise, we're trying to run ahead and fulfill our purpose and the Nazarite vow has been totally forgotten.

Remember who you are as an individual. You are a child of God. You have been chosen by him to be devoted to him alone. And remember who you are as a community.

You are God's people. We are his church brought together by him to show that God alone is the only one worth devoting your entire heart and soul to.

And so, in summary, when we focus on competing idols, rather than devoting ourselves to the Lord, we will not realize the Lord's purpose for us. We forget who we are.

Now, let's find out what happens to our relationship with God. What we're going to see from this story is that not only do we forget who we are, we forget who the Lord is too.

[25 : 58] God starts to seem unfamiliar, unrecognizable. You don't see him when he shows up and acts. When you allow idolatry to creep into your life, you no longer recognize the Lord for who he is.

You no longer recognize the Lord for who he is. The funny thing in Judges chapter 13 is that Manoah and his wife aren't quite sure who they're talking to just yet.

This is a very strange thing. Manoah's wife tells him in verse 6 that, a man of God came to me and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God.

Very awesome. Then she says, I did not ask him where he was from and he did not tell me his name. She recognizes there's a supernatural quality to the visitor but it's confusing, it's ambiguous, she isn't really sure who he is and Manoah is going to look even more clueless than his wife.

He simply refers to the visitor as the man of God. It's not clear that he recognizes that this man is anything more than a holy man or prophet.

[27 : 17] Maybe he thinks his wife is exaggerating. Like, oh sure, yeah, yeah, he has an appearance like an angel of God, I'm sure. What they don't realize, the two of them, is that this angel of the Lord is in fact the appearance of the Lord God himself in physical form.

That's a pattern that occurs again and again in the Old Testament. The Lord appears himself and it's going to become clear to Manoah and his wife very, very soon that this man of God that they encounter is actually so much more than that.

Manoah reaches the man and he starts trying to interrogate him, this mystery man and the funny thing is that this man of God he's interrogating is being pretty tight-lipped and then things get really awkward starting in verse 15 because the man doesn't tell him very much more than what Manoah already knows and then Manoah in verse 15 said to the angel of the Lord, please let us detain you and prepare a young goat for you.

And the angel of the Lord said to Manoah, if you detain me, I will not eat of your food but if you prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the Lord for Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the Lord.

Now these two verses are critical. They open our eyes to what is going on in this story because in that culture, hospitality was so important.

[28 : 52] It still is in Middle Eastern cultures today. A good host would make sure his guests were treated well. Eating together, that meant that all was well between them.

Having a meal together was so, so important. Being able to host was important. And so naturally, Manoah offers his honored guest a meal to eat and he gets rejected.

If you detain me, I will not eat of your food. Imagine inviting someone over for dinner and they said that to you. Yeah, if you invite me over, I'm not going to eat anything you offer.

Even in our culture, that stings to hear that, doesn't it? That stings ten times worse to Manoah. It's helpful to contrast this with a similar encounter back in Genesis chapter 18 because there the Lord appears in human form to Manoah's ancestor, Abraham.

Abraham. And the Lord announces that Abraham's barren wife will give birth to a son. That sounds very familiar. But the Lord speaks first to Abraham.

[30 : 06] He doesn't go around him to his wife. He speaks first to Abraham. He sits down and has a meal together with Abraham. He even invites Abraham into his private thoughts as he talks about

the destruction of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The Lord treats Abraham with this incredible intimacy and respect and friendship. And in contrast to all that, look at how the Lord has been treating Manoah.

He's been keeping him at arm's length. He won't even eat with him. The message is loud and clear and here's what the message is. All is not well between us.

All is not well between us. And what's the problem? Well, the narrator explains why all is not well at the end of verse 16. Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the Lord.

He hasn't figured it out yet. Imagine if your closest friend showed up at your front door one evening and you opened the door and you see your friend and then ask, who are you?

[31 : 11] Now, your friend might laugh. They think you're playing a joke but then you say, no, seriously, do I know you? How would your friend feel? Do you think they'd be offended?

Do you think that your friend would say, you know, all is well between us? Well, of course not. And should the Lord not be offended when you claim to know him but you don't read God's word and you don't recognize him for who he is and you have no clue what he is like?

And when someone tells you what he is like, you're just baffled. As for Manoah, we'll get to why he doesn't recognize the Lord in just a moment.

But as it now stands, the Lord tells him he won't eat with him. Manoah, the truth is Manoah's being a bit too casual here. He thinks he can just sit down and eat with the Lord and the angel of the Lord says something has to happen first.

If you prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the Lord. What he's saying to Manoah is that this is how you should relate to me right now.

[32 : 26] You need a sacrifice. We can't just sit down together like there's nothing wrong between us. We can't just eat a meal like we're best buds. Your sin of idolatry has destroyed your ability to recognize me and it needs to be atoned for or we will not be reconciled.

Sacrifice is a way to atone for sin. This is another way in which idolatry corrupts you and me. We begin to treat God as though he is nothing special.

We stick him in a cubby hole, fit him in in between our favorite leisure activities, remember him when we're not busy with our favorite political or social causes.

You know, if you happen to have some leftover time today, maybe you might pray to him, but you certainly wouldn't have set aside the best time of your day to do that. You'll come to church if you can work it into your schedule.

You'll read the Bible if you've got nothing better to do. And when the Lord becomes nothing special and you no longer recognize who he is, you will respond to him in a casual way.

[33 : 43] You will respond to him in a casual way. Does it seem like no big deal to you to pray, to come to church, to talk about God? Do you not realize the gravity of what you are doing when you do so?

Coming into the presence of God is not a trivial matter. You are sitting in the presence of the almighty God of all the universe, the God who holds the universe together, who holds the very matter of your body together, the God who is holy and hates the very sight of sin, the very sight of rebellion and resistance to him, the very sight of the self-reliance that we love.

There is nothing casual about this encounter. Yet if you respond to the Lord in a casual way, the reason you do that is because you misunderstand his greatness.

You misunderstand his greatness. Here's what happens next in the conversation between Manoah and the angel of the Lord. Verse 17, Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, what is your name so that when your words come true we may honor you?

And the angel of the Lord said to him, why do you ask my name seeing it is wonderful? Manoah still doesn't know who he's talking to so he asks for a name and once again the Lord doesn't answer him on his terms.

[35 : 14] The angel of the Lord said to him, why do you ask my name seeing it is wonderful? There are a few things that are truly deeply wonderful. One of those wonderful things was the series of miraculous events in which God brought the people of Israel out of Egypt.

In Deuteronomy chapter 26 Moses reflected on all these events and he reminded the people of Israel the Lord God brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm with great deeds of terror with signs and wonders.

A wonderful deed is something only God can do something that makes your jaw drop something that knocks you to the ground because it is far far outside the realm of ordinary experience. It is the mighty hand of a wonderful God a God who steps into history a God who wonderfully and decisively intervenes on behalf of his people.

And so what the Lord is saying to Manoah with this reply is this you have no idea who you're dealing with here. I am not some two-bit travel-sized deity that will do whatever you want that you can control.

[36 : 33] I am not a God who folds up and fits conveniently in your pocket. I am fearsome. I am powerful. I am the almighty God who works wonders. And you don't just waltz up to a God like that.

You do not treat him casually. You enter his presence with fear and awe. You sing praise God from whom all blessings flow.

You plead with all creation to join you in praising the only one who is worth it. But if you want to pursue other gods other idols here's what you will always have to do.

Here's how you'll always have to treat that God who works wonders. You will have to take that wonderful God and you'll have to carefully cut him down to size and you'll have to reshape him and sand off his rough edges so that he'll fit neatly into the leftover crevices of your life.

You keep the parts of him that you like you know maybe you just love his kindness and his love and his patience. You remove the parts that you don't like. Maybe you don't like his holiness and wrath and so you cut those parts off.

[37 : 43] And then the God you're left you no longer fear him because you've neutered him. And he no longer fills you with awe and wonder. That's the price you have to pay in order to keep all the competing idols in your life happy because the real true God pushes them all out.

When you choose to serve idols you will always misunderstand the greatness of the Lord. This is what Israel has been doing with the Lord God. They've bought into the lie that he can be treated just like any other God.

But Manoah and his wife they come face to face with reality starting in verse 19. Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to the Lord to the one who works wonders.

And Manoah and his wife were watching. And when the flame went up toward heaven from the altar the angel of the Lord went up in the flame of the altar. Now Manoah and his wife were watching and they fell on their faces to the ground.

the angel of the Lord appeared no more to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the Lord. So now Manoah knows who he has just seen face to face and he responds in verse 22.

[39 : 02] We shall surely die for we have seen God. That's actually a pretty common response in the Bible when people encounter the living God.

Fear is a very instinctive response when a person sees God for who he really is in all his glory. And the funny thing is we think okay great Manoah finally gets it.

Shouldn't we finally be praising his response and just when we're convinced that Manoah gets it his wife chimes in and as all women tend to do to their husbands she makes him look clueless.

Right? That's kind of her role in the story basically by the way is to make him look clueless. Verse 23 His wife said to him if the Lord had meant to kill us he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain offering at our hands or shown us all these things or now announced to us such things as these.

Basically his wife piles on reason after reason why her husband is wrong. They're not going to die. The Lord He didn't show up and do all those things to punish them but to show mercy to them.

[40 : 16] He has accepted their offering and He's going to give them a son remember? The thing is the counterfeit gods of the Canaanites oh Manoah is so used to dealing with those gods he's so used to dealing with gods who are impulsive gods who are impossible to please you had to grovel before them they could change their mind at a moment's notice the weather could change at a moment's notice your fortunes could change at a moment's notice they weren't kind and patient they didn't show mercy you were always living in fear of ticking them off you were trying to keep them all happy living in fear and that's the problem with our idols too isn't it?

They're not very merciful if you trust in your RRSP it might come back to bite you a reception could cripple it if you live for the praise of others a sudden harsher insensitive word will crush you if you

trust in a politician they may betray you or God forbid lose an election idols make very cruel masters and so we take that cruelty we take that capriciousness and we think the Lord our God is like that too we think he is like these unreliable idols that we have devoted our lives to that we are trying to control that we are controlled by if you serve idols instead of the Lord you are no longer going to recognize the Lord for who he is because you will overlook his mercy you will overlook his mercy you think that oh if I sin against him he is going to beat me up for it have you ever felt guilty about something wrong you did have you ever felt like

I can't come before God unless first I pray hard enough I confess well enough I find some way to beat myself up and punish myself so that I can come before him I have to do some sort of penance before God will let me near that's the way an idol worshiper thinks that's the way Manoah thinks the moment he sees who he's really dealing with idolatry makes you clueless about God you no longer recognize him for who he is at first you respond to him in a casual way because you misunderstand his greatness and when you do comprehend his greatness you overlook his mercy his kindness his salvation so yes when you turn away from the Lord and serve idols you will no longer realize the Lord's purpose for us and we will no longer recognize the Lord for who he is but there's more to the story the Lord proves faithful regardless of your idolatry the Lord he proves faithful regardless of your idolatry remember if you are a

Christian you have been chosen by God as his treasured possession this is a God who loves you this is a God who just like he did with Israel he doesn't give up on you that easily yes you've sinned yes you're guilty of idolatry don't avoid that truth don't avoid that reality embrace it but never never never overlook and downplay the mercy and the kindness of our God God because our God he has raised up a savior to rescue us from ourselves he has raised up a savior to rescue us from ourselves even when the people of Israel were no longer crying out for a deliverer the Lord still sent one there's a message of hope at the end of this chapter beginning in verse 24 and the woman bore a son and called his name

Samson and the young man grew and the Lord blessed him and the spirit of the Lord began to stir him in Mahanadan between Zorah and Eshterol now if you keep reading the story you're going to find that Samson is going to be a far from perfect judge Samson is actually going to be something of a major disappointment but Samson still will begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines just like the Lord promised he is blessed by the Lord he is stirred up by his spirit and you know what you and I have someone so much better than an imperfect Samson we have a far more perfect deliverer a far better Messiah about a thousand years after these events took place an angel appeared to a virgin who could not possibly bear a child and he announced that she too would give birth to a son her son would be blessed by

[45 : 29] God and led by his spirit and this son would offer himself as the sacrifice to bring us near to an unapproachable God this man's name is Jesus the God man and he is the only one who can rescue you from your idolatry he's the only one who can rescue you from the judgment that comes against all idolaters you see you can try to escape idolatry on your own you can promise yourself okay I'm just going to pray a little more I'm going to read my Bible more I'm going to do a lot of church things I'm going to give my money to a homeless shelter I'm going to be nice to kittens I'm going to do whatever whatever it takes to make me feel like I'm a better person but you're always going to slide right back into worshipping your old idols and in the process you might make some new ones that's what happens when we try to save ourselves but Jesus he came to be the perfect worshipper of God he never let money or a new house or technology or a career or romance or sex or family or political causes or entertainment or leisure activities or anything he never let any of those things dim his white hot passion to see God glorified wherever you feel like you're failing right now Jesus succeeded he succeeded whatever your sin is whatever your idolatry is

Jesus took upon himself on the cross in your place God poured out all his anger on Jesus Christ there is none left for you if you repent and you believe in him and are welcomed home so yes please pray more read your Bible more get involved in church do all those things but do them not out of a desire to earn your place before God do them out of gratitude gratitude because you've already been chosen and loved by God you've been given a new identity in Jesus Christ one day he is going to destroy all idols and he will take their place as the unrivaled Lord the Lord will prove faithful regardless of your idolatry on that day he is going to fully and finally rescue you from yourself praise be to

God our God and our father I thank you someone far greater than Samson is here we have received our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and you are freeing us from the controlling power of these idols whom we have devoted ourselves to forgive us Lord for not remaining exclusively wholeheartedly devoted to you it has just warped our thinking we don't even know who we are anymore what we're here for it has warped our thinking about you we forget things about you that are so important we lose sight of it it warps our relationship with you oh God free us and deliver us and give us new life as we look to Jesus Christ and see the far better Savior and cast ourselves for mercy on him and plead with you may your spirit fill us with the fullness of Christ make us mature make us like Jesus

Christ in every way a human being can possibly be as we look to him and worship him and long for his return amen to Lord bring us to give us a show how come on