

SCARECROWS IN A CUCUMBER FIELD

JEREMIAH 10: 1-10

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There is a Spanish proverb which says, “Take what you want and pay for it, says God.”

Jeremiah was telling his people, the people of Israel, that they were about to pay for turning away from God.

President Lincoln, during the Civil War, wrote, “We trust, sir that God is on our side. It is more important to know that we are on God’s side.”

Today, we are talking about idolatry. The immediate problem with speaking about idolatry is that our natural reaction is to believe that idolatry is not a problem today. We look at life and we do not see anyone bowing down to idols. There are not idols in our house. When we think of idols we think of images made of stone, wood, or metal that are placed in a shrine where we physically bow down before it. This, however, is an archaeological view of idolatry, not a biblical view.

John Calvin said, “The human heart is a perpetual factory for idols.” The scriptures validate this truth. Let us hear what God said through the prophet Ezekiel.

Then some of the leaders of Israel visited me, and while they were sitting with me, 2 this message came to me from the LORD: 3 “Son of man, these leaders have set up idols in their hearts. They have embraced things that will make them fall into sin. Why should I listen to their requests? 4 Tell them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: The people of Israel have set up idols in their hearts and fallen into sin, and then they go to a prophet asking for a message. So I, the LORD, will give them the kind of answer their great idolatry deserves. 5 I will do this to capture the minds and hearts of all my people who have turned from me to worship their detestable idols.’” (Ezekiel 14:1–5 NLT)

The following is one of the best definitions of Idolatry that I have ever read: Idolatry is taking the good things given to us by God and making them the ultimate thing, thinking it can give us significance, security, safety, and fulfillment.

The people could not handle trusting in the unseen god so they needed to make a physical idol that they could look at and find their fulfillment in it. Everything that is seen is given to us by God. Yet we take these physical, seen things and make them important. We give them purpose. They become the priority in our lives. We find our worth in the things of this world or the things we do in this world. –

Reinhold Niebuhr, the great 20th Century theologian, whose specialty was the social gospel, writes that the western world has looked for meaning in terms of progress and that meaning, purpose, and peace would be established through education, science, human understanding, and social organization. Now, we realize that instead of solving all problems, the problems have become more entrenched, more extensive, more interwoven, and, like Pandora, we have opened the box and are unable to replace the contents.

St. Paul writes of this fragmentary character of all human knowledge. In I Corinthians 3: 18-19, he writes “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written “He catches the wise in his craftiness” and again “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are foolish.”

What are we to make of these words? We are reminded early on in Genesis, that God created all things, including wisdom. Therefore, the proper understanding and application of wisdom is when it is dedicated to God, understanding that through God, the Holy Spirit will help us with the proper ways of wisdom. The medicinal qualities of cocaine, derived from the coca plant, have been twisted and perverted and now cocaine is one of the great scourges of the planet.

Logic, which God created, has been twisted to the degree that now people say it is not logical to believe in Him who created logic.

Paul writes “Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love.”

John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, who were very close friends, wrote regularly to one another. They had been exchanging their thoughts about the character of faith. Jefferson wrote that he was a Christian only in the sense that Christ, so he thought, would admit discipleship and that he believed in universal benevolence (similar to Paul’s phrase “The greatest of these is love.”

This did not go far enough for Adams. He responded with a classic answer. He said, “Faith means that I rejoice in God and his creation, and I exalt in my own existence.”

This last phrase clearly reflects the words of the psalmist in Psalm 139, which is titled “The Prayer of A Believing Heart.” Throughout this psalm, we read of the omniscient and omnipresent God.

“O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me...Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence...If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there thy hand shall lead me...for thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother’s womb...I praise thee for thou are fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are thy works...How precious to me are thy thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. When I awake, I am still with thee.”

Scarecrows in a cucumber field! When we look to other than God for life, we do not find life. In Galatians 5: 22-23, we find the fruit of the Holy Spirit to be “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against there is no such law. And those who belong to Jesus Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we look for the fruit of the Holy Spirit in any other place than at the foot of the cross, we are looking to scarecrows in a cucumber field to tell us what to do and how to live and how to relate and how to pray.

In Luke 19:10 we read that “The son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” Scarecrows cannot do that. Why would we expect them to?

There is a poem which wonderfully expresses the power and purpose and care and love of God.

“It is only a tiny rosebud, a flower of God’s design;
But I cannot unfold the petals with these clumsy hands of mine.
The secret of unfolding flowers is not known to such as I
God opens the flower so easily, but in my hands they die.
If I cannot unfold a rosebud, this flower of God’s design,
Then how can I have the wisdom to unfold this life of mine?
So I’ll trust in God for leading each moment of my day.
I will look to God for guidance in each step along the way.
The path that lies before me, only my Lord knows.
I’ll trust God to unfold the moments, just as He unfolds the rose.”

Will you trust your life to the scarecrows in the cucumber field, or will you trust your life to Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God? It is your choice and yours alone. Choose wisely.