

Sermon Discussion Questions: Numbers 25

August 5th, 2018

1. What in the sermon encouraged you, comforted you, challenged you, or informed you?
2. Read Numbers 25:1-3. When talking about the idolatry of Israel with the gods of the Moabites, Moses uses words such as whoring after, bowing down, and yoking (figurative word referring the binding of two animals together for agricultural work). How do these various words help define what happens in the pursuit of idolatry?
3. In Numbers 25:10-11, the Lord says that Phinehas modeled the Lord's jealous response to Israel's idolatry. Exodus 20:5-6 reminds Israel not to bow down to idols because God is a jealous God. Oprah Winfrey says that this idea of God being jealous caused her to turn away from the Christian faith because she could not conceive of a God who is "jealous of me." Her interpretation seems to be that God sees something that we have that does not belong to God that He wants.
The context for God being a jealous God comes from the Preamble of the Ten Commandments: Exodus 20:2 ² "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." How does realizing the Lord's deliverance of Israel to be His people shape our understanding of God's jealousy when we worship other gods? How might you clarify to Oprah the difference of God being jealous of us vs. jealous for us?
4. In this text we see that the death because of sinful idolatry is taken away by the execution of justice. This brings covenantal peace. This execution of Justice that was poured out on the Israelite and Moabite through Phinehas "turned back God's wrath from his people" (Numbers 25:11). In what way does this turning back of wrath through the execution of justice on a particular person point to the atonement of Christ (see Romans 3:23-26)? How might meditating on this steadfast love of God substituting Jesus to take our wrath motivate us to turn from idols to the living God?
5. Tim Keller argues that we have many surface idols (those tangible objects, people, positions, etc. that we outwardly pursue) which are rooted in deeper source or meta idols (the deep longing of the heart which is pursued in those surface idols). The meta-idols are Power: the longing for influence over others. Approval: The longing for love and respect. Comfort: the longing for pleasure and a quality of life. Control: The longing to have mastery over my life. Which meta-idol do you struggle with most?

Idolatry Discernment Helps

Circle which surface idolatries you struggle with the most

- **Image idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- I have a particular kind of look or body image."
- **Helping idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- people are dependent on me and need me."
- **Dependence idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- someone is there to protect me and keep me safe."
- **Independence idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- I am completely free from obligations or responsibilities to take care of someone."
- **Work idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- I am highly productive getting a lot done."
- **Achievement idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- I am being recognized for my accomplishments, if I am excelling in my career."
- **Materialism idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- I have a certain level of wealth, financial freedom, and very nice possessions."
- **Religion idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- I am adhering to my religion's moral codes and accomplished in it activities."
- **Individual person idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- this one person is in my life and happy there and/or happy with me."
- **Irreligious idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- I feel I am totally independent of organized religion and with a self-made morality."
- **Racial/cultural idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- my race and culture is ascendant and recognized as superior."
- **Inner ring idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- a particular social grouping or professional grouping or other group lets me in"
- **Family idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- my children and/OR my parents are happy and happy with me."
- **Relationship idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- Mr. or Ms. 'Right' is in love with me."
- **Suffering idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- I am hurting, in a problem -only then do I feel noble or worthy of love or am able to deal with guilt."
- **Ideology idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- my political or social cause or party is making progress and ascending in influence or power."
- **Understanding idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- I understand why I am the way I am and understand my idols!"
- **Safety idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- I am pursuing the safest course of action and not taking risks emotionally or physically"
- **Authenticity idolatry:** "Life only has meaning / I only have worth if -- I am not pretending and being honest [shameless] about who I really am"

Answer at least one of these diagnostic questions:

- a. What is my greatest nightmare? What do I worry about most?
- b. What, if I failed or lost it, would cause me to feel that I did not even want to live? What keeps me going?
- c. What do I rely on or comfort self with when things go bad or get difficult?
- d. What do I think most easily about? What does my mind go to when I am free? What pre-occupies me?
- e. What prayer, unanswered, would make me seriously think about turning away from God?
- f. What makes me feel the most self-worth? What am I the proudest of?
- g. What do I really want and expect out of life? What would really make me happy?