

MEETING THE REAL GOD OF ABRAHAM

A Devotional Meditation on Yitro (Jethro)

Exodus 18:1-20:26; Isaiah 6:1-7:5, 9:6-7;
2 Kings 18:1-4; Job 23-1-17; Matthew 21:33-41

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My Mother told an amusing story about a friend of hers whose husband was a pastor. One Friday evening, when our high school football team was playing against one of our chief rivals, Mother saw her friend getting caught up in the action. Her husband, however, was engrossed in a deep theological conversation with one of the men from the church. At one very tense moment, Mother said her friend punched her husband in the shoulder and said, “Stop talking church! It’s time for football!”

This story illustrates why we all admired this woman of God. She was deeply devoted to the Lord and his people, and could relate to people where they were – both in the sanctified setting of church, and in the raw reality of daily life. However, there is another way to interpret this story. The truth is, we exist in a



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world, or worlds, of our own creation. In these little worlds, we seek to keep things organized according to our own preferences. This is true of both of the most reprobate, godless people, and the most devoted saints. The difference is merely a matter of degree: the reprobates make no pretense of having anything to do with God, while the saints put their godliness on display, and justify or hide those moments when the godly mask slips.

This applies not only to high school football games in Alabama, but to any sports. It’s not that sports are evil of themselves, but they do too easily become idols. In fact, anything can become an idol – even our devotion to our Creator. That happens when we shift our attention from the Creator himself to our image of him. That’s what happened to the bronze serpent Moses constructed at God’s direction to bring healing to the people of Israel in the wilderness. Centuries later, that bronze picture of God’s grace and mercy had become a substitute for the Almighty and an object of worship.

This is what we have always done. Our service is more to the image of God than to God himself. The images take many forms: icons, holy books, relics of saints, and even doctrines and creeds. Anything that places man’s filtered perception of God above the real thing can be an idol. It’s a chronic failure of the human condition. God’s thoughts and ways really are so far above our own that we can never figure him out. There’s something about the eternal, infinite Creator that will always be beyond the capacity of our finite, mortal selves to comprehend or even recognize. We learn that from Job:

Today also my complaint is bitter;
my hand is heavy on account of my groaning.
Oh, that I knew where I might find him,
that I might come even to his seat! . . .
Behold, I go forward, but he is not there,

and backward, but I do not perceive him;
on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him;
he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him.
But he knows the way that I take;
when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.

Job 23:2-3, 8-10 ESV

This is the man who was blameless in all his ways, yet when he encountered the Living God he was struck speechless at the indescribable glory of the Almighty. Even at this early stage of his ordeal, Job comprehended the vast chasm between his own mortality and God's infinity. As he said:

My foot has held fast to his steps;
I have kept his way and have not turned aside.
I have not departed from the commandment of his lips;
I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.
But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back?
What he desires, that he does.
For he will complete what he appoints for me,
and many such things are in his mind.
Therefore I am terrified at his presence;
when I consider, I am in dread of him.
God has made my heart faint;
the Almighty has terrified me;
yet I am not silenced because of the darkness,
nor because thick darkness covers my face.

Job 23:11-17 ESV

There is hope in those last two lines. Our Creator is terrifying, yet he chooses to make himself known to us, and desires to dwell intimately within us. That's a thing Moses understood at Mount Sinai, but the native and foreign-born Israelites with him did not. When God spoke the Ten Words directly to them, the experience was too frightening. Beyond the heavenly shofar that vibrated their bones and the cosmic voice that spoke visible words, their terror may have been linked to the realization that this God of the Universe didn't want to be a component of their existence, but the core of it. That's why they pleaded for Moses to be their mediator. As long as God's commands and instructions came to them filtered through Moses, they could continue relegate to God the things he required while maintaining the fiction of being in control of the rest of their lives. In other words, even the direct revelation of God could become another idol.

This is why God became one of us, with the expectation that we would respect his Son more than we respected his messengers. Of course, we know how that has turned out so far: some rejected the Son, some ignored him, and some turned him into yet another idol. We have all done some or all of this. Even those who reverence the Son and, through him, the Father, still are susceptible to relegating him to a compartment of our lives so that we can maintain the fiction of being in control of the rest.

The good news is that our Creator expected this. That's why this entire millennia-long human story is really the tale of us coming to the end of ourselves so the real story can

begin. He's not seeking devotees who can relegate him to categories of their lives, but intimate partners with and through whom he can govern the universe. That's why he became one of us. It was the only way to cut through our idols and images and introduce himself as the real God of Abraham.