

THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF THE GODS

'Jesus said, 'You are gods.' (John 10:34)

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Dedicated to every deity destined to disappear.
You still have a voice, or a plea, but for only
moments longer.
And then you will be no more.
Even your memory will fade, quickly like smoke
out a window.
Everything you did – good, bad, indifferent – will
be reversed.
You will never have existed.

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1. Introduction

Ruins fascinate me. Especially castles and palaces where someone arrogant once ruled, once roared, but now cannot even whisper. They cannot stop even the fading of their memory amongst the living. Memory, only a thing in the minds of mortals, and all mortals destined to die.

I've heard death described as 'humiliating' to mankind. It just happens – heart, mind and body – and there is nothing anyone can do about it. And no matter how high the towers you built, the tomes of wisdom you published, the vaults of money you had or gave away, you disintegrate and disperse like chaff in the wind, the exact same fate as the beggar or the thief.

When I walk the corridors of a castle now, I feel such a rush of meaning. I look on the decay, touch the walls of past eras, past glories, past horrors, past generations, and I hear the Spirit whisper: **'Seek the Lord while he may be found.'** (Isaiah 55:6) As a nobody now I can stand in the chambers of past kings, the sole reason being I live and they are no more. They simply cannot lock the doors. And their inheritance and legacy and authority are no more. I can walk their regal corridors and speak freely in their throne rooms.

King Solomon, hailed as the wisest of kings, concluded his own writing by saying:

'Remember your Creator before your flesh returns to the dust it came from, and your spirit returns to God who gave it.'

(Ecclesiastes 12:7)

And this call, this prompting, comes from within, also: ***'My heart says of you, 'Seek his face.' Your face, Lord, I will seek.'*** (Psalm 27:8)

2. The Rich Ruler

A man approached Jesus, fell on his knees, called Jesus, '*good teacher*', and then asked:

'What must I do to inherit eternal life?'

Note: The man is successful, reverent (on his knees), respectful (*'good teacher'*). This guy is looking good and behaving appropriately before God.

Jesus checks in with him on the basics, '*Are you keeping the commandments?*' The man assures Jesus that he is and has done since he was a boy. Jesus adds:

'One thing you lack. Go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor. Then come and follow me.' (Mark 10:21)

Now look what happened:

'At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.' (v.22)

Selling our possessions and giving to the poor is not the gospel message. It is not what Jesus preached as the door to eternal life. It does not save the soul, any more than obeying the commandments saves the soul. Jesus came as '***God with us***'¹ and his call to us was the same

¹ Matthew 1:23/Isaiah 7:14

as God's call to us thousands of years before:

'You shall have no other gods before me.'
(Exodus 20:3)

Jesus came as God in the flesh² and called us to come to him. He called us to turn from false gods, from our sin, and follow the one true God: ***'Then come and follow me.'***

With the rich ruler, Jesus gently put his finger on the man's idol: wealth. This was a false god in this man's life that stood between him and God. This false god was not preventing him from kneeling before Jesus, from respecting Jesus, or even from obeying the commandments. Well, at least nine of the ten. Because the very first one, which is a matter of the heart, the soul, the spirit, is to have no other gods before Christ. And he could not, when tested by God, let go of his money for the sake of Christ, even for the sake of eternal life.

² John 1:1,14

3. Rachel's Gods

In Genesis 31 we read about Rachel and her husband, Jacob. Long story short, after having lived twenty years with the in-laws (Rachel's father, Laban, and company), Jacob and Rachel decide to set out for a different land. They do this secretly as Laban was a rather formidable character. However, before leaving we are told that **'Rachel stole her father's household gods.'** (vs.19)

Of course, three days into their journey Laban figures it out, and pursues them. However, **'Rachel had hidden the gods inside her camel's saddle and was sitting on them.'** (vs.34)

So Laban did not find them, and the little gods remained with Rachel.

Now, seriously for a minute, let's consider. These 'gods' could be picked up and stolen. These gods could be shoved in a saddle and sat on. Where's the power? Do these gods have any say in who actually takes them, owns them, or sits on them?

This might sound funny, but this is exactly the nature of all idols. Even massive, gaudy structures. They might look impressive when finished, and lights are shining on them, but they did not fall from heaven. Arrive a couple months

earlier – as I have been witnessing in my own hometown of late – and you will see the temple being built. By humans. Bricks, mortar, concrete, wood, string, straw, paint. I mean, when half-built is it half-deity? When does this idol actually become something spiritual?

And back to Rachel's gods:

Where are they now?

4. Snake God

Here's what went down...

The Israelites were living and journeying through the desert. It was a hard slog. Their leader was Moses. God had done powerful miracles in the sight of this people, and was visible daily in the form of a pillar of cloud, and by night as a pillar of fire.³

'But the people grew impatient on the way, and spoke against God and against Moses. They said, 'We detest this miserable food!''

(Numbers 21:5)

So God sent venomous snakes among the people; they bit the people and many died.

(Pretty sure the complaining about food stopped at this point)

The people cried out for help, and Moses took this plea to God. God orders something very mysterious:

'The Lord said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live."' (vs.8)

Moses made a bronze snake, put it up on a pole,

³ Exodus 13:21

and just as God had said, people who had been bitten looked up at this snake and were healed.

Fast forward a few years:

'King Hezekiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.)' (2 Kings 18:3-4)

So what God once formed and used as a tool of faith, a tool of repentance, the people then took and made an idol. The purpose of the bronze snake originally had been a focus point for people's repentance. It was a punishment of God because they had dishonored God, and it was designed to focus people back on God. It started this way, the intended way, but then the people made an idol out of the tool, the token, the pointer. They dropped their eyes from the Creator to the created. Paul puts it this way:

'They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.' (Romans 1:23)

This is the tendency of mankind. Our eyes drop naturally. To lift them is an act of faith.

And where is Nehushtan now?

5. Cow God

Prior to the snake god event, there was the golden calf event.

God, through Moses, had performed mighty miracles before their eyes, particularly the parting of the Red Sea: ***‘The Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.’*** (Exodus 14:29)

There had been resounding communications from God through Moses, claiming to be the true God and their God. And the people had been clear in their understanding and response: ***‘The people all responded together, ‘We will do everything the Lord says!’*** (Exodus 19:8)

Well, Moses left them for forty days to consult with God on Mount Sinai. And here’s what happened:

‘When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.” (Exodus 32:1)

These people had seen, touched and tasted miracle after miracle. And yet, with just a little bit

of distraction, distance, time, they turned their hearts, minds and efforts towards false gods.

They all put in their own gold, had it melted down and fashioned into an idol, a golden calf. A cow. And they worshipped it. To read the full account, jump in and pick it up from Exodus 32.

Just two things to note here:

1. Where is that golden cow now?
2. We also have seen, touched and tasted miracle after miracle. Do we put our gold – money, time, strength - into false idols, into sin?

6. Baal

There were nine-hundred prophets of Baal against Elijah and his God. Thousands of people from Israel stood on the sidelines of Mount Carmel to watch.

Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal in this way, he said: You set up an altar with an animal sacrifice on it, and call down fire from heaven to consume your sacrifice. In other words, no lighting the fire, let your gods do that. Elijah said he would do the same:

‘You call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire – he is God.’ (1 Kings 18:24)

So from morning till evening these prophets of Baal danced around their altar, calling on Baal, and even cut themselves with swords ***‘until their blood flowed.’*** (vs.28)

Elijah taunted them, and taunted Baal:

‘Shout louder! Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.’ (vs.27)

But nothing happened: ***‘There was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.’*** (vs.29)

Elijah then takes his turn. He sets up his altar and pours water on it three times, until water even filled the trench around the altar. Then Elijah called on God: ***'Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back to you.'*** (vs.37)

'Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.' (vs.38)

There is much to consider in this account, but that's for another time. Right now we only ask the simple question: *Where is Baal now?*

In those days you could not speak a word against him without being killed. Did that make him true? If so powerful, true, and worthy of worship, where is he now?

Do gods die? Are they just fads? Popular for a season, but then an earthquake destroys a temple – or the Romans do – and the gods disappear?

7. Your God?

The God of the Bible claims to be the one and only. This is from start to finish, two thousand years of writing, forty authors.

'I am the Lord, and apart from me there is no other God.' (Isaiah 45:5)

When Jesus came, he claimed to be the Son of God, which meant he was God's own expression of himself in the flesh.

'In Christ all the fulness of God lives in bodily form.' (Colossians 2:9)

This had been the prophecy of the Savior to come, that he would be called ***'God with us.'*** (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23) We were told – or warned – that the child to be born would be called ***'Everlasting Father.'*** (Isaiah 9:6) And for this reason Jesus said to his disciples, ***'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.'*** (John 14:9)

There is profound mystery around the oneness and yet uniqueness of the persons of God in Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit. But Scripture reveals undeniably (does not explain) that the three are one, the one are three.⁴

⁴ For more specific Scriptures on this, please see the free booklet, 'Who is Jesus?' at 1peter1three.weebly.com

The true God being one and only, was clearly understood by the people of Jesus' time. There had already been more than one thousand years of writing on this, history of this, and protection of this truth. And it was for this truth, this reason, Jesus was crucified - for his claim to being one with the one and only God. His crime was his identity. But his salvation – his *'good news'* – was also his identity.

Jesus as God – is this a crime against me, or salvation for me?

One of many examples in Scripture about Jesus being God is found in John 10:24-33

‘The Jews said to him, “If you are the Savior, tell us plainly.”

Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me... I and the Father are one.”

The Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?”

“We are not stoning you for any good work,” they replied, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.”

What happens next is very interesting. Jesus had just told them to listen to his words, and also consider his miracles, as evidence that he was

the Savior – the one and only, for there is only one. When he stands strong in this place, this identity, they seek to kill him, because yes, he is claiming to be God. In this tense moment Jesus turns up the heat. This is what he says:

‘Is it not written in your Scriptures that people, also, are gods? They are divine, made in God’s image – and the Scriptures cannot be denied!

Now, if you are god-like, made by God and in his image, how much more so me, who God set apart and sent into the world! I am doing the very works of God, so that you may know and understand that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.’ (vs.34-38)

Here Jesus just reinforced his identity, doubled down on the very reason they were about to stone him. With rocks raised, Jesus made one last attempt at elevating their thinking, saying you are gods but I am God, you are divine but I am Divinity. And yes, they got the point, and so ***‘Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.’*** (vs.39)

What is noteworthy is that when Jesus quoted Psalm 82:6 – ***‘I said, ‘You are gods!’*** - the hearers would have known the text and the verse that followed: ***‘But you will die like mere mortals.’*** (vs.7)

However, Jesus did not die like a mere mortal.

Jesus died as a sacrifice for sin, as a weapon against death. He died and in doing so defeated the grave. He then rose again and offered mortals new life, eternal life.

'Christ defeated death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.'

(1 Timothy 1:10)

As humans we can reject God our Creator. We can reject Jesus Christ. This is what it is to be made in the image of God. We can choose back. This is to be alive. This is what makes all relationships we have meaningful, real, true.

Not only can we choose God or reject God, but we can make our own gods. Whatever we give worth to, i.e. 'worship', we have made a god, a priority, a guide, a treasure. Jesus puts it this way: ***'Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'*** (Matthew 6:21) Whatever we put above the true and living God, is our god. Money? Status? Sin?

But as with Nehushtan, Baal the rich ruler's wealth, the Golden Calf, will your god survive? Or does your god die with you? And if so, what is this deity you serve? Where is the power, the promise, the truth? He, she, it cannot save you.

Jesus said, ***'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to God except through me.'*** (John 14:6)

Thank you for taking time to read this book. For more free resources to encourage you in your faith, please visit:

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