

Worshipping a Block of Wood?

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Elizabeth and I recently watched master woodworker, Eric Hollenbeck on TV. He lives in Eureka, California: Redwood country. He spoke eloquently about his passion for Redwood trees. He said that he had a spiritual connection with the trees. They have an energy. He called that energy “God.” After listening to Hollenbeck, I was reminded of a passage in Isaiah.

The ironsmith takes a cutting tool and works it over the coals. He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm. He becomes hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. The carpenter stretches a line; he marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house. He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, “Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!” And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for you are my god!” (Isa. 44:12-17).

Eric Hollenbeck articulated a perspective shared by many people. Everyone is able to recognize they have a spiritual need deep within themselves. They seek to fill that need through nature and their profession. People often describe how they feel most connected to God when they are fishing, working in their yards, on a hike, etc. The activity brings them some sense of connection to a high power and personal satisfaction. Isaiah calls this perspective into question.

Learning from Isaiah’s Craftsman

1). Creation declaring the Creator. People are right to acknowledge God in creation. The natural world communicates the knowledge of God. David wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Psa. 19:1). Much later, the apostle Paul wrote, “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made” (Rom. 1:19-20).

The natural world communicating the existence of the Creator is intended to humble us. Nature is one method to direct us to obey the Creator. And, there is more to obeying the Creator than a woodworking project.

2). Worshipping the creation instead of the Creator. Many people worship creation instead of the Creator. Isaiah explained the absurdity of the idolatrous woodworker: “They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so

that they cannot understand. No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, “Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?” He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?” (Isaiah 44:18-20).

The absurdity of what Isaiah describes in this passage is obvious. Of course, we cannot be saved by a block of wood. Yet, many seek salvation in things other than the Creator. Some try to find meaning and fulfillment in careers, possessions, relationships, social status, etc. We expend energy attempting to craft purpose in such endeavors. When we fill our lives pursuing such things, we become idolaters.

3). The Creator provides our needs through His Son. Creation declares the existence of the Creator. Yet, the Creator has spoken in more significant means. The greatest means through which the Creator has spoken is through His Son, Jesus (Heb. 1:1-2).

After taking a mountain hike with Jesus, God told Peter, James, and John, “...This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him” (Matt. 17:5). We cannot please God without listening to what His Son has commanded. Connecting to nature will not save us. Finding a sense of purpose through the goals we accomplish or the relationships we build will not save us.

Jesus explained He was the path to God: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Rather than living for an idol, we must live for Jesus.

Conclusion

There is nothing wrong with enjoying nature. There is nothing wrong with finding a satisfaction through a profession or hobby. However, if we pursue a vocation at the exclusion of the Creator and His Son, our vocation will keep us from what matters most: our salvation.

In Jesus, we are given a new identity and a new vocation. Through our obedience to Jesus, He makes us His children. As He changes us, our personalities are directed towards serving Him. We use all we are to fill our Creator’s world with His glory.

We are to be amazed by the natural world. As nature declares the Maker’s praise, we must respond in humble adoration of the Maker. For us, this involves honoring the Maker’s Son. If we ignore Jesus, we are no different than the Isaiah’s craftsman who worshipped a block of wood.