

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

“I am a Christian solely and entirely because of the grace of God and not because of anything that I have thought or said or done. He brought me to know that I was dead, ‘dead in trespasses and sins’, a slave to the world, and the flesh, and the devil, that in me ‘dwelleth no good thing’, and that I was under the wrath of God and heading for eternal punishment.

He brought me to see that the real cause of all my troubles and ills, and that of all men, was an evil and fallen nature which hated God and loved sin. My trouble was not only that I did things that were wrong, but that I myself was wrong at the very center of my being.”

[Martyn Lloyd-Jones testimony to Iain Murray, p. 64, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, The First Forty Years, 1899-1939, Banner of Truth]

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Dagon and the God of Self

May 11th, 2025

Sermon Text: 1 Samuel 5

Scripture Reading: 1 Samuel 4-5

Man in his sin is an idol factory.

Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the likeness of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (Romans 1:22-23)

In my 42 years as a pastor, and especially in these last 32 years ministering here, there is one particular sin which has been the

chief fortress raised up against the knowledge of God. It is an idol. It is the idol of *self*. This sin above all others characterizes this community and it has been and continues to be the Broadway which takes people to hell. *Self. This terrible thing called Self.* By it many have made shipwreck of their faith, trading the treasure of Christ to worship this idol.

Like all idolaters, worshippers of *Self construct an image of this god.* And this image bears *their own face, their own likeness.* It is the image of themselves, of *Self*. Its worshippers bow down to it, feed it, carry it about with them, and demand that everyone else bow down as well. And yet –

Psalms 115:4-8 Their idols are silver and gold, The work of man's hands. (5) They have mouths, but they do not speak; They have eyes, but they do not see; (6) They have ears, but they do not hear; They have noses, but they do not smell; (7) As for their hands, they do not feel; As for their feet, they do not walk; They do not make a

sound with their throat. (8) Those who make them will become like them, Everyone who trusts in them.

It is my purpose this morning to show you this evil image which is so rampant around us and to warn you, as the Psalmist does, *those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them.* Deaf. Blind. Dead.

Dagon – God of the Philistines

The Israelites had been defeated by the Philistines in battle. Without consulting the Lord, they decided upon a plan. Treating the ark of the Lord as a kind of talisman, they went to Shiloh and got it. Roaring crowds welcomed its arrival, identifying it with Yahweh. “Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh, that IT may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.” Essentially, they regarded the ark as a kind of image of Yahweh. IT would save them.

But it did not work. The Lord did not go out to battle for them. A

horrendous thing happened. The evil sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas died, and worse – the Philistines captured the ark. Eli realized that the capture of the ark was far more terrible than the death of his sons and when he heard the report, he fell over backward and died. It was Ichabod, the glory had departed from Israel.

Now, of course the Philistines interpreted all of this not only as a great victory, but as a demonstration of the power of their own god, Dagon. They took the ark, which they regarded as an image of Yahweh, and put it in Dagon's temple, right in front of his image. They mocked the God of Israel and things were about to take a turn against them.

Dagon was their god, the image which they had constructed. It was to Dagon that they made offerings, and to Dagon they prayed. They housed him in a temple which they built. And yet, what is the truth-

Psalms 97:1-7 Yahweh reigns, let the earth rejoice; Let the many

coastlands be glad. (2) Clouds and thick darkness are all around Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne. (3) Fire goes before Him And burns up His adversaries all around. (4) His lightnings light up the world; The earth sees and trembles. (5) The mountains melt like wax at the presence of Yahweh, At the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. (6) The heavens declare His righteousness, And all the peoples see His glory. (7) Let all those be ashamed who serve graven images, Who boast of idols; Worship Him, all you gods!

The Philistines were about to be shamed. Their boast in Dagon would be proved a lie. Dagon himself would be thrown down:

1 Samuel 5:1-4 Now the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. (2) Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it to the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon. (3) Then the Ashdodites arose early the next morning, and behold, Dagon had fallen on his

face to the ground before the ark of Yahweh. So they took Dagon and set him in his place again. (4) But they arose early the next morning, and behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of Yahweh. And the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands *were* cut off on the threshold; only the trunk of Dagon was left to him.

of the Philistines and said, “Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, so that it will not put us and our people to death.” For there was a deadly confusion throughout the city; the hand of God was very glorious there. (12) Now the men who did not die were struck with tumors and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

“Worship Him, all you gods.” And so it was. Dagon was broken, prone before the ark of Yahweh.

Things were about to grow worse for them.

The Lord struck the Philistines with tumors. Did they repent and bow down to Yahweh? No. Like all idolaters, they clung to their god. Knowing with certainty that even Dagon had been humbled and that the tumors were the judgment of Yahweh upon them, yet they still clung to their self-made religion and god.

1 Samuel 5:11-12 They sent therefore and gathered all the lords

Idols and Images Need Constant Maintenance

Idols, these false gods like Dagon, are *dead*. They have no power to save. Their worshippers may have carved mouths and ears and noses and feet and hands in their image, and yet Dagon cannot speak, hear, smell, walk, or touch. They are dead, the product of the fools who carve them:

Isaiah 46:5-7 “To whom would you liken Me And make Me equal and compare Me, That we would be alike? (6) “Those who lavish gold from the purse And weigh silver on the scale, They hire a goldsmith, and he makes it *into* a

god; They fall down, indeed they worship it. (7) “They carry it upon the shoulder *and* bear it; They set it in its place, and it stands *there*. It does not move from its place. Though one may cry to it, it cannot answer; It cannot save him from his distress.

This is a perfect and accurate description of what we are seeing today. Rome is the great idol worshipping religion. Its priests carry images of Mary or some other Roman saint. They carry the god image in procession with pomp and circumstance and the adulation of the crowds. And yet that image cannot move. It must be carried. When it is set down, it can only remain there. The deluded masses cry out to it for salvation and help, but the image cannot hear, it cannot save, it can do nothing.

See how the billions of people throughout the world are deceived by Satan. They have their Dagon and Dagon has his priests and temples. That is what Rome is – never forget. This new Pope is all over the news, regarded as Christ

upon earth (though bearing the title “Vicar”), and yet he is the spirit of antichrist. Like Satan, he appears as an angel of light. Yet Rome nor the Pope, nor Rome’s sacraments, Rome’s church, have no power to save. Rome is the construct of man, energized by the devil.

Now, there was Dagon toppled over, face down before the ark. His worshippers had to set him back up again. He could not move himself. The next day, he was down again, this time with his hands and head broken off.

Dead images, the idols of man, require constant maintenance and repair. But Yahweh –

Isaiah 40:26-31 Lift up your eyes on high And see who has created these *stars*, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His vigor and the strength of *His* power, Not one of *them* is missing. (27) Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel, “My way is hidden from Yahweh, And the justice due me passes by

my God”? (28) Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, Yahweh, the Creator of the ends of the earth, Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is unsearchable. (29) He gives power to the weary, And to *him who* lacks vigor He increases might. (30) Though youths grow weary and tired, And choice young men stumble badly, (31) Yet those who hope in Yahweh Will gain new power; They will mount up *with* wings like eagles; They will run and not get tired; They will walk and not become weary.

Those who serve Self, construct an image – like Dagon. Only this image is less tangible. It isn’t a stone statue (though you would find such images in the local Rome establishment). No, the image of Self is primarily in *a Name*. A reputation. A family name. It is the spirit of Babel –

Genesis 11:4 And they said, “Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *will reach* into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, lest we be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”

Let’s return to this god, this idol called *Self*. It is, as I said, the spirit which I believe characterizes this community in which we live. It is the god, the religion of the town. Self. The image of Self. Most of the so-called “churches” here are actually its temples. Places where, in the guise of “Christian,” the worshippers of Self can gather. Not for the Lord’s glory, but for Self-glory.

Let’s look more closely.

There it is. *Let us make a name for ourselves*. The chief idol of the sinner is *himself*. He seek his own glory. He builds his own temples. He even takes measures so that his *Self* will endure – consider the tombs of the Pharaohs – and yet you can see more common example all around us. This terrible, wicked, idol called *Self*.

Now, like any idol, Self has no power to save. It is an image constructed by the hands of man

just like any false god. It must be constantly propped up and defended by its worshippers. Vast amounts of energy, in fact virtually every single thought and act performed by its worshippers are designed to keep the image propped up.

There has been one chief common denominator which I have seen over and over and over again here in these last 32 years of ministry, in people who have made shipwreck of their faith. And it is this – *when Self is exposed as a false god, when Dagon's image topples, they are enraged.* The worshippers of Self are terrified that their god will be exposed as a false god, as a dead image, so they do all they can, moment by moment, to keep that image propped up. They boast. They build buildings. They put themselves forward in the community. They flatter so that they can be flattered (like the false teachers in Galatia). They have children to pass on the “name.” They establish “churches” where Self can be adored. *And they demand that everyone else worship their god, their Self.* Or else!!

The Name of the Lord is to be Praised

Now, with that black backdrop of wickedness described, can we not understand more fully why the Lord Jesus said things like this? –

Matthew 10:34-39 “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. (35) “For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; (36) and A MAN’S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD. (37) “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. (38) “And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. (39) “He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

Matthew 16:24-25 Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. (25) “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

Hebrews 11:24-26 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, (25) choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, (26) regarding the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

Do you see it? *Deny*. Deny what? *Deny SELF*. Be crucified with Christ. That is what a cross is for. Give up this life of “self” and follow Christ. Reject, as Moses did, self-glory as the son of the Princess of Egypt, and look to Christ and His kingdom for His glory.

Do you grasp the exclusivity of it? If a man or woman or young person craves self-glory and the things this world offers, *that person cannot be saved. They cannot be Christ’s because He will not have them.*

Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

To be saved, to be born again, I must die. I must be joined, by the work of the Holy Spirit, to Christ so that the old man, the old me, the sinner, is crucified and buried and gone. If I choose to cling to who I am as a sinner and yet, like so many professing Christians today, delude myself into thinking that I can have heaven too, I am a fool. We can have Dagon or Christ. Not both.

The idolater whose god is *Self* will find the true Lord Jesus repugnant. Why? Because Christ is a fool to the world. And His people are fools to the world.

1 Corinthians 3:18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise.

And again -

1 Corinthians 4:10-13 We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are prudent in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are glorious, but we are without honor! (11) To this present hour we hunger and thirst, and are poorly clothed, and roughly treated, and homeless; (12) and we labor, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; (13) when we are slandered, we try to plead; we have become as the scum of the world, the grime of all things, *even* until now.

This idol of Self is a dark spirit hovering over this community. I think that after 32 years of ministry here I am qualified to speak to this. It infects the churches here and hides in a “christian” disguise until

Dagon teeters a bit. The image is threatened. The “name” is exposed, and the worshipers of Self rage.

Herein is a diagnostic tool – *how open are you to truth about yourself? Do you rile and rage with offense when truth is applied to you? Are you constantly busy propping Dagon up because God’s truth has knocked him over? If so, you are in bondage, a slave to fear.*

3 John 1:9-10 I wrote something to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not welcome what we say. (10) For this reason, if I come, I will bring to remembrance his deeds which he does, unjustly disparaging us with wicked words. And not satisfied with this, he himself does not welcome the brothers either, and he forbids those who want *to do so* and puts *them* out of the church.

Do you want *freedom*? Satan uses FEAR to keep people enslaved. But Christ sets us free.

Hebrews 2:14-15 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, (15) and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

You live in a place where the air we breathe is poison. It is this worship of Dagon, this deifying of Self which is the deadly infection here. A plague. Perhaps you have been catechized in it by an idolatrous parent, taught that life is all about Dagon and keeping him propped up. It is a terrible bondage, a devilish lie, and it takes all who follow its path to Hell.

Christ has come to set us free of all this. To take up our cross and be put to death in Him so that we can be raised up as new creations. Have you died? Has your old man, your old self been crucified and buried? Or are you still living to make a name for yourself? These are

matters of eternity. Of heaven or hell.

Psalms 113:1-9 Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD! (2) Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time forth and forevermore! (3) From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the LORD is to be praised! (4) The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens! (5) Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high, (6) who looks far down on the heavens and the earth? (7) He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap, (8) to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people. (9) He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD!