

Exodus 32

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[0 : 00] This morning we return to the book of Exodus where we have spent the last two summers. Lord willing, we will complete the book of Exodus the first week of September.

Having taken some time away from Exodus, it's worthwhile to spend a few minutes recounting the journey that has led up to this point. The book is titled after the remarkable deliverance of the enslaved people of God from the hand of Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

It was accomplished through demonstrations of miraculous signs and wonders mediated primarily through a man named Moses. Their redemption served two purposes.

It set the God of Israel apart from all other gods. And secondly, it gathered to God himself a people that would worship him in a designated place.

Moses, upon the Exodus, on the other end of the Exodus, writes a song in Exodus 15. And it aptly summarizes where we're at. It reads, Who is like you, O Lord among the gods?

[1 : 08] Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? You stretched out your right hand. The earth swallowed them. You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed.

You have guided them by strength to your holy abode. See, Israel's deliverance was not purposeless. The Lord does not simply redeem and abandon the people.

Rather, the Lord redeems in order to be in a relationship with people. This is the manner which the Lord deals with us even today. See, the relationship between the redeemed and the redeemer will be governed by the words of the redeemer.

We know them as the Ten Commandments. Probably better translated, more accurately, the Ten Words. Revealing a distinct ethic of the people of God. They were not an oppressive or exploitive law.

Rather, they were, according to the book of Deuteronomy, they were not empty words, but they were their very life. And by this word, they would live long in the land.

[2 : 11] In other words, adherence to God's spoken word would be their very sustenance, the assurance of their flourishing and their guarantee of their prosperity.

Accompanying these words, we found last summer, are instructions on constructing a dwelling place, the tabernacle of God, so that he may reside with them. And since God was going to reside with his people, they were to model themselves after God himself.

They were to emulate God in creation, in Sabbath, in work, in rest. The law was given graciously so they would know God, they would be like God in their behavior, and that they would prosper.

However, the primary way they were to relate to God was through worship. And so, in Exodus, over ten chapters, ten of the forty are, probably some would say tediously devoted to the construction of the tabernacle.

Detail after detail. Blueprint after blueprint. Measurement after measurement. Why? Because God is most concerned about how his people relate to him.

[3 : 21] And if they were to relate to him rightly, they had to worship him properly. Worship is the primary way to relate to God.

Therefore, the people of God must be settled in how to go about worshiping God in God's prescribed way.

Israel, the people of God, they were unlike any other nation. They were to behave unlike any other nation. They would enjoy the blessings, peace, and prosperity, unlike any other nation.

For among them dwelt a God unlike any other. This is what is so horrific about Exodus 32. The nation, unlike every other nation in her redemption, becomes a nation just like every other nation in her revelry and idolatry.

Exodus 32 is the great interruption in the book of Exodus. Because it's sandwiched between the instructions on building the tabernacle and the implementation of the tabernacle itself.

[4 : 31] And in between, the assembly of the tabernacle is, are these two chapters that interrupt what God is doing.

It's like the film director who's showing you different narratives, developing different characters. And the film editor has panned the camera onto Moses. And there, Moses, at the end of chapter 24, is in the splendor of being in the presence of God.

And the film director pans the camera over to the people of God. And there they are. According to verse 6, eating, drinking, rising up to play, celebrating their earthly existence, caught up in their sin. Perhaps you and I can identify with both. We have this duplicity as believers. In some moments, we're utterly consumed by the goodness and the grace of God, leading us to burst forth into song, even dancing, weeping in our gratitude, joyful in our countenance.

Yet there are moments where the thought of our redemption is far from us. Our worldly anxiety is our obsession. Our possessions define us.

[5 : 51] Our earthly performance bring us meaning. We too are stiff-necked people. A phrase used of cattle harnessed by a yoke, unwilling, unrelenting, to turn to the right or the left because of their stubbornness.

Here, we find in Exodus 32, one of, arguably, one of the most vivid depictions of human rebellion in all the Bible.

I don't believe in the history of Israel. A moment is more cited by the prophets than this moment here. More than Genesis 3, Eve in the Garden.

More than Achan's folly in Joshua 7. More than David's mistake in 2 Samuel 11. All of them were sins.

Horrific. And all of them, interestingly, have this root cause, a sin that's tethered to their eyes. And so you read in Genesis chapter 3, where when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was delight to the eyes, she took of its fruit.

[7 : 08] Achan in 2 Samuel chapter 11, when he's brought forth as to why he took some of the plunder, he said, well, this is what I did.

When I saw the spoil, a beautiful cloak, 200 shekels of silver, a bar of gold, I coveted them, and I took them.

You know the story, 2 Samuel 11. David, on his rooftop. What did he do? He saw from the roof a woman bathing.

And the woman was very beautiful and he sends for her. And here in Exodus 32, you have the same root cause. You see it in verse 5. When Aaron saw this calf, what did he do?

He built an altar before it. It's horrific. See, as Christians, we must be wary of living by sight. We are those who are to live by what is spoken, what is heard, the received word, and therefore we live by that word, namely the word of God embodied in the person of Christ.

[8 : 22] This is the grounds of the covenant in chapter 24, verse 3. They are to adhere to the... This is... Just turning back to it. After all the words are spoken, according to 24, verse 3, Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, all the rules, and the people answered all the words of the Lord, we will do.

Here we have the great warning for the Christian. We tend to think that what has been spoken is not enough. What we hear is not sufficient.

What is revealed is not adequate. And we want to live by sight. We want to see it. But we are not a people who live by sight. We are a people who live by faith.

Jesus' words may be hyperbole, but perhaps the weightiness of the warning is amplified in light of all these incidents I just mentioned. If your eye causes you to sin, take it out.

It's better to enter into heaven maimed than your whole body cast into hell. And this morning we come to Exodus 32 and I want to assert this.

[9 : 40] Before God, because of your sin, judgment is a certainty. Pardon is a possibility.

Before God, because of your sin, judgment is a certainty and pardon is a possibility. Four markers to move us along through the text this morning. I'll identify them all up front.

There is a great sin. A great sin. It's followed by a great pardon. A great pardon. Followed by a great judgment.

And it concludes with a great refusal. A great sin. Verses 1-10. I lift this phrase directly from the passage.

It's found three times in this chapter. 32 verse 21. 32 verse 30. 32 verse 31. It's clear what the author is trying to convey.

[10:43] That what has been done by the people of God is unacceptable. The sin is horrific. There is actually the term, the Hebrew term great sin only occurs five times in the entirety of the Hebrew Bible.

Three times here in this chapter. It's horrific in that they so quickly departed from the words that they had just pledged themselves to in chapter 24 verse 3.

The opening words given to Israel in chapter 20. You might remember these. Where he is about to unfold the Ten Commandments or the Ten Words and God speaks these words and he says, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of slavery.

And here in 32 verse 4 all of a sudden you see these exact words attributed to a golden calf in verse 4. These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

God himself had already declared that it was him. He was the source of deliverance. Yet here, Aaron attributes to God Aaron attributes what God did to a golden calf.

[12:05] Perhaps Aaron even goes as far as depicting the God of Heaven as a golden calf. As if a calf were the form of God. It was a violation of the first two commandments.

Having grown up in Silicon Valley, there's a unique culture of intellectual property. Patent law is high in demand because ideas, designs, technologies are all patented so that when industries are aware of who gets credit and more importantly, probably these days, who receives the royalties when their patented technology is applied.

You'll read stories in major newspapers, so this is a true one, Nokia suing Apple for alleged patent infringement in the US and Germany. Corporations are both pursuing litigation and defending against litigators based on the claims of intellectual property and patents.

Why? Because the underlining premise is this. The one who did the work receives the credit. Right. The one who did the work receives the credit.

This is why academic plagiarism is frowned upon. I looked it up, the student manual at UChicago, the opening line in academic policies and requirements regarding plagiarism is this.

[13:26] It is contrary to justice. It is not right. You cannot receive credit for what you did not do.

It is unjust when one who does all the work does not receive all the credit. And this is what is at work here. God's glory will not be shared.

How dare you apply what God did to something that did not do it. This is not academic plagiarism.

This is cosmic plagiarism. You have not been delivered by a calf. You have been delivered by the Lord of Heaven. It is idolatry. Martin Luther has described it as this.

Whatever your heart clings to and relies upon, that is your God. Whatever your heart clings to or relies on for ultimate security, the idol is whatever we claim loyalty to over God.

[14:28] See, this is the nature of idolatry. We place our hope and confidence in that which in the end cannot save or deliver, whether they be academic accomplishments, relational capital, successful children, professional achievements, whatever you idolize.

How do you know what you idolize? It tends to be the thing that you daydream the most about, what you think and talk about the most. When you believe these things save and deliver you, the Lord's wrath burns hot.

The believer is warned of a life plagued by idolatry. We see it in 1 Corinthians 10. Paul says, flee idolatry as life goes on, eating and drinking and playing.

The result is clear that the wrath and the anger of God has been incited. It is described as a wrath that burns hot, a burning anger. 32 verse 10, 11, and 12.

God is infuriated. The text is clear in what God, in communicating what God desires to do. His desire, according to verse 10, is that He would consume them and bring disaster upon them.

[15:52] He is actually going to obliterate, considering obliterating His people. Exodus has already demonstrated this is possible in the perishing of the firstborns of Egypt and the armies of Pharaoh in the sea.

Moses knows that this is not an exaggeration by any means. So in verse 11, we find this verse, Moses implored the Lord.

we see a great sin, and it's followed by a great pardon, beginning in verse 11. The exchange in this section is so fascinating because it's not a dialogue, it's actually Moses petitioning, interceding before the Lord.

There are two questions posed to God, followed by two exhortations to God, given to God, resulting in God relenting or turning from His anger.

It's not an exchange of words, rather it's Moses, only Moses documented as speaking, and the Lord acting on behalf of Moses' petition. Moses is saying, God, why are you angry?

[17 : 11] What about your glory? Recall your promise to your people. Know the grounds of Moses' argumentation. He invokes two things, namely the Lord's reputation and the Lord's promise.

And what Moses tells God to do for God's own sake is this, uphold your own very reputation by demonstrating that you are both powerful in bringing out your people from Egypt, and secondly, that you're not evil, that you are actually good, that you are both powerful and good.

Secondly, what about the promise you made to Abraham? You are a promise keeping God. Keep that word, uphold it. See, the reason behind God's pardon, it's very important to note this, is rooted in the character of God himself.

His reputation, his honor, his word are at stake. Those are what move him to relent. From the text, God is not changing his mind because of the quality of Moses' character.

God is not changing his mind because of the significance of relationship that he has with Moses.

God is not relenting because he feels pity for Israel.

[18 : 29] He pardons because it's a demonstration of his glory before the nations. He pardons because he has promised himself to retain a people.

He pardons because he's a merciful God. Because God relents, disaster is averted and the people are spared.

It was a great pardon. A great sin. A great pardon. Thirdly, a great judgment. As the Lord turns from his anger, Moses turns and descends down the mountain.

Forty days have transpired according to Exodus 24. before, since he's ascended up the mountain.

Presumably, he picks up Joshua, who has been waiting also for forty days, on the way to camp.

They approach and they're greeted by a sound. It's not the sound of war, rather the sound of celebration, singing and dancing. Apparently, the people had broken loose.

[19 : 35] Commentators are varying opinions of what that actually means. But it is a display of unrestrained people. They are acting as if they are ungoverned, acting as they willed.

The phrase they eat, drink, and rose up to play might have, you know, sexual connotations to it as well. Whatever it was, the people were in disarray.

And what was the result, according to chapter 32 verse 25, is that the people of God were shaming God before the nations.

God was being mocked by the behavior of his own people. And upon this sight, Moses responds in the same way God had actually responded.

He is incited to anger, to the degree that the author chose to use the exact same language as the anger of God. It's an anger that burned hot, verse 19, and again in 22.

[20 : 37] The tablets of the covenant he was carrying, etched by the hand of God, were hurled to the ground and broken, emblematic of the status of the covenant between God and his people.

And here we find a great irony, because the one who formerly pleaded on behalf of the people to the Lord to relent from judgment, now is the one who actually initiates the judgment.

The one who had asked for mercy was now the one exacting wrath. The judgment is unfolded in two parts. There's the destruction of the idol.

The object which was misleading them, this calf, this golden calf, probably overlaid in, probably a wooden object overlaid in gold, is destroyed.

It's ground into powder and most likely dumped into Israel's water source. And secondly, the judgment is the destruction of those who are in rebellion. He makes a call to those who are still on the Lord's side.

[21 : 45] Because one of the underlining things that is happening in this chapter is whose people are these? Drayton actually enunciated it in his reading. Because you find, you find, the Lord says to Moses, go down for your people, your people, Moses, who you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves, your people, Moses.

And then, in verse 11, Moses replies, hey God, why does your wrath burn hot against your people?

So the underlying thread in this chapter, whose people are these? And Moses makes a summon. if you are on God's side, come here.

And so they arise with their sword at their side. They go to and fro from gate to gate. And the Bible records for us 3,000 men fell.

Naturally, questions arise. How were 3,000 men identified? Did they go door to door? Were only men slain? All questions worth asking. But don't overlook this one important aspect.

[23 : 07] The judgment that was carried out by Moses is actually God's judgment. It's divine judgment according to verse 7. Thus says the Lord God of Israel, put your sword on your side.

It's justified in verse 29 where the Lord actually, Moses says, the Lord will bless you for what you've done. Rebellion and idolatry have dreadful consequences.

It was a day of great judgment. A great sin. A great pardon. A great judgment. And lastly, a great refusal.

The close of this chapter records the second petition of Moses. Beginning in verse 30, he says to the people, you have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord and perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.

And once again, Moses intercedes on behalf of the people. But the result is not the same as the first petition.

[24 : 14] This time his request is denied. God refuses to grant Moses' request. The Lord relented.

He held back in the first intercession. But in the second intercession, he chooses not to withhold disaster from the people. He not only sends a plague, according to verse 35, which surely resulted in loss of life, but the day which is alluded to in this passage is the promised judgment, probably where the entire generation would fall in the desert.

The narrative demonstrates an escalation of understanding for Moses. Upon seeing idolatry, Moses recognizes God is fully justified to consume Israel in judgment.

Moses' request is staggering. He has already mediated God's judgment in that he instructed the people on behalf of God to carry out the death of 3,000.

Now he mediates another position. So he represented God in bringing about the death of 3,000.

And now he swings allegiances to the people. And he says, God, the people have sinned.

[25 : 32] Forgive them. But if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written. Moses is trading his life for theirs. Moses understands that God's holiness, what God's holiness requires, and he offers himself as a sacrifice for their sin.

God's sin. The self-sacrifice is admirable, even commendable, but note this, it was unacceptable.

The guilty would remain guilty. Those who offended God would receive what they deserve. The sinner would still be accountable. God will not clear the guilty.

He cannot simply acquit those who defy him. Even at the cost of the very eternal destiny of Moses himself, champion of Israel, friend of God, God will not forgive.

And verse 33 emboldens for me, becomes the weight that all humanity endlessly bears, where God asserts, whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book.

[26 : 50] before God. Because of our sin, judgment is a certainty, pardon is a possibility. What are we to make of this chapter as we close?

See, chapter 32, I believe, is actually a pictorial depiction of who God is about to reveal himself to be. In chapter 34, verse 6 and 7, if there is a verse, if you star, underline, highlight, memorize, cut out, whatever, this is probably one of the most key passages to the entire Bible.

Exodus has posed this question in chapter 5, where Moses and Aaron approach Pharaoh and say, hey, hey, Pharaoh, let God's people go, and Pharaoh responds with this question that the book of Exodus is trying to answer.

Pharaoh says this, who is the Lord that I should obey him and let Israel go? I don't know the Lord, and moreover, I won't let Israel go.

And so the book of Exodus is moving toward a definition. Who is the Lord? In chapter 34, verse 6 reads this, the Lord passes before Moses and proclaims, the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers and the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation.

[28 : 33] And so what you see when God is about to define himself in verse 34, he actually demonstrates himself in chapter, he's defining himself in chapter 34, he is about to demonstrate himself in chapter 32, I am a God who is willing to relent and forgive, but I am not, and I am a God who will not clear the guilty.

In light of sin committed against him, he is both merciful to pardon and just to judge. well, the plea by Moses is this, if, if you will forgive their sin, blot me out of your book, unaccepted by God. God, but being students of the Bible, you know there was another man, and there as he hung upon the cross, he did not use the conditional if you will forgive, he actually said, Father, almost instructing his father, almost as if he knew that what actually, as his life was unwound, he knew. And he said, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. He would not accept, God would not accept the sacrificial life of Moses, but God would accept the sacrificial life of his son. What was denied to Moses was granted to Jesus. Moses desired to pay with his very life the price for redemption, for the people to receive forgiveness, but God refused.

[30 : 33] And Jesus came to pay with his very life the price of redemption for people to receive forgiveness, and God accepted. Moses' statement was an if.

Jesus' statement was a done. And so, as our time has gone, this is why our obsession at Holy Trinity is with Jesus.

Because as I mentioned before God, your sin, because of your sin, judgment is certain. Pardon is possible in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together. Father, Father, we, oh, if we could only find the words to express the gratitude for what was accomplished in Jesus.

In Moses, we see a good and great man. And even his petition was denied. God is denied. But in Jesus, we see a perfect man where his petition is granted.

[31 : 55] And so, as a congregation, we desire to seize Jesus, to embrace Jesus, to cling to Jesus, to trust Jesus, to follow Jesus, to give our lives unto Jesus.

Why? Because in Jesus is redemption, the forgiveness of sins. And to Jesus, we respond and we sing.

Amen. Let's stand and let's sing together.