

Jealous to be known

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Date: 15 December 2024

Preacher: Dave Bott

[0 : 00] Our first reading is from Exodus 32 verses 1 to 14. So Aaron said to them, Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons and your daughters and bring them to me.

So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf.

And they said, These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it.

And Aaron made a proclamation and said, Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord. And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings.

And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. And the Lord says to Moses, Go down, for your people whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves.

[1 : 32] They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made themselves a golden calf and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it and said, These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

And the Lord said to Moses, I have seen this people and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them in order that I may make a great nation of you.

But Moses implored the Lord, his God, and said, O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people?

Whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand. Why should the Egyptians say, with evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth?

Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self and said to them, I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring and they shall inherit it forever.

[2 : 52] And the Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people. The next reading is from Exodus 33 verses 15 to 23.

And he said to them, if your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people?

Is it not in your going with us so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth? And the Lord said to Moses, this very thing that you have spoken I will do.

If you have found favor in my sight and I know by your name. Moses said, please show me your glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim you my name, the Lord.

And I will be gracious to you, to whom I will be gracious. And I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But, he said, you cannot see my face.

[4 : 02] For man shall not see me and live. And the Lord said, behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock. And while my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock.

And I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand and you shall see my back. But my face shall not be seen.

The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord, our 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 whom will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers and the children and the children's children, the third and fourth generation.

And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshipped. And he said, If now I have found favour in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us.

For it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin. Good morning, everyone.

[5 : 24] Will you please pray with me as we come to God's word? Father, I pray that through your word, you would convince each of our hearts to voluntarily come to you and lay all the idols at your feet, so that you might fill us with yourself.

So please speak to us now. Give us minds and hearts ready to receive your word. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Well, if a friend asked you to describe God's character, I wonder what adjectives you would use.

I'm guessing loving would rightly come to mind. Compassionate, holy, patient, wise.

No doubt you can think of lots more descriptions. We can understand the appeal of these qualities, can't we? Because when we see it in human beings, just a faint reflection of it, we can see the goodness of these qualities.

I think we could just imagine God on a greater scale. He's all wise. He's all wise. He's all patient. We are going to rush the ending of Exodus today.

[6 : 55] But I was trying to think, what's going to help us tie all this together? And I think it's the description of God that we find here in Exodus, that God is jealous.

How do you react to that? God is jealous. It feels unworthy to describe God that way, isn't it?

I wonder if you're a bit repulsed. I'd be surprised if you're not, because jealousy is pretty awful in human beings.

This is where God is so different from us. Tim Keller describes jealousy as love-fighting, extinction.

It's the fear of that love relationship being lost, that love turns to anger to keep it.

[7 : 58] Where a man's love for a woman, when she's leaving him, it's threatened, and that love turns to anger, even to the point of murder.

It's awful in human beings. Or a friend. Someone, a friend you really love, starts spending time with someone else, and starts confiding in someone else, and there's something in you that's like, I don't want to share.

It's petty. It's insecure. Like, in people, jealousy is unattractive, and deadly.

So it's no wonder, I think, that we stumble over this description of God, that God is jealous. But, it's in the middle of the Ten Commandments, where God reveals his character.

We can't say that his jealousy is just this obscure part of Scripture, some periphery description. It's right there in the middle. I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.

[9 : 12] It's the reason for the first two commandments. You shall have no other gods beside me. You shall make no images, no created thing. He's jealous that he has all Israel's devotion.

Let's not think this is just an Old Testament description. I don't know what you would describe this, but jealous, when Jesus says this in Luke 14. If anyone comes to me, and does not hate his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

He wants all of us. Compared to any other allegiance, he's jealous to have all of us.

I'm wondering, if instead of being repulsed by this description, can we find the jealousy of God beautiful? I think we can.

Obviously, I wouldn't be preaching on it if I didn't. It's beautiful in God, awful in human beings, but it's such good news in God. I think we can start to see if we reflect a bit on what we've seen in this series in Exodus.

[10 : 38] What kind of relationship does Yahweh want with his saved people? We've seen his goal of redeeming his people repeated, to bring you to myself.

Get out of slavery so that you can serve me. That's his goal. We've seen the kind of relationship in the wilderness experience. He's not some distant God.

He's present. He's a companion. He's leading them. He's speaking to them. We've seen the binding nature of the relationship.

He wants covenant with his people. It's binding. That's the kind of relationship. We've seen the law. The law is not a new slavery.

It's clear directions of how Israel could please God. Anyone know the movie Princess Bride?

[11 : 42] Okay. All right. Good. You better. That's your homework if you don't. But does anyone remember Wesley's repeated expression of love for Buttercup?

Thank you. Yes. We've got some true fans here. As you wish. That's his expression of love. As you wish. That's what we do, isn't it?

Someone we love. Someone we esteem. We work out what pleases them and we give our will to them to please them as you wish. And it doesn't feel like they're controlling us because our pleasure is in pleasing them.

That's what the law is. Israel, here's how you can please me. He hasn't left them guessing how to relate. The law is good.

That's the kind of relationship he wants. To know how they can please God. And last week, we've seen the kind of relationship he wants in the tabernacle.

[12 : 50] He wants to be present. He wants to be close. He wants to make a home with his people. He wants to be known.

He wants his people to have access, intimacy. So when God says, I am a jealous God, I must be your priority.

I must be the centre of your life. I will not let you put anything, anyone, to be more important than me. He's saying what every married person expects and desires from their spouse.

That's the kind of relationship God wants with his people. Exclusive. Intimate. Very little has been said about sin so far in Exodus.

We're up to chapter 32. Very little has been said about sin. But in chapter 32, sin is mentioned 11 times. I'm having three weeks off over Christmas and I'm not expecting to come back and you all kind of go, we lost confidence that you're coming back.

[14:05] Here, 40 days. 40 days. And Israel, having heard God's voice, they're still around Mount Sinai.

They haven't moved. They still see the pillar of cloud and the fire. Within 40 days, they come to Aaron and say, make us gods. I can't believe Aaron led them into, this is Aaron.

Aaron was the spokesperson to Pharaoh. He was instrumental in their freedom. He ate and drank in the covenant ceremony. He ate and drank with God.

He's about to be high priest. Aaron and all the people so quickly turned to idols. I think it's to show us the human condition.

So quick to turn to idols. And we see it played out in the rest of Israel's history. That's the human condition. John Calvin described a human heart like this.

[15:14] The human heart is a perpetual idol factory. I think of it sometimes like whack-a-mole.

I don't know if you know the game. You probably don't. It's a bit of a weird game. Whack-a-mole. Arcade. When I was younger, something, an idol pops up, you whack it, another one, another three pop up.

Our hearts are just a perpetual idol factory. So what is an idol? They take the gold jewelry.

There's nothing wrong with the gold jewelry. That was a gift from their redeemer. They take a good gift and they created with their own hands an image to make it their top priority.

To make it the meaning of their life. The true source of their joy. These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

[16:20] It's a good gift but it's something made by human beings that replaces God as top priority.

Redefining them even. This is who we are now. I doubt it felt wrong when they're doing it.

I reckon if we were there, they're dancing around this thing. If you were to ask them, they probably felt, they would have said, I feel at peace with this decision. It created a sense of community.

It gave them an identity. This is our story now. This is who we are now. It gave them meaning. They could see it. They could sense it.

I think it's the kind of justifications I give to all sorts of things when I make it more important to God.

[17:25] It gives me peace. It gives me pleasure. It doesn't feel wrong. Others are doing it. So why is it so wrong?

Why is idolatry so wrong? Why is it so wrong? Why is it so wrong? Why is it so wrong? Why is it so wrong? Why is it so wrong? Why is it so wrong? If you picture a marriage ceremony, it's a really profound expression of love, isn't it, when the husband and wife look at each other in the eyes and say, with all that I am and all that I have, I honour you.

Can you hear how either we're playing word games there or we all know that's love? With all that I am and all that I have, I honour you.

Is that word games? I don't think so. That's love, isn't it? It's exclusive.

It's everything. It's exclusive. It's exclusive. And it's destructive when something else takes the priority in a marriage.

[18:49] Even at a human level, think of what can unravel a human marriage. It's not always really awful things. It's not always adultery. It's not always domestic violence.

Sometimes it's good things just taking priority. Can't a wife feel so alone when the husband is just obsessed with the job or obsessed with his friends?

It can be a good thing that just gets distance in the relationship. It can be a good thing.

Even children. Where a husband and later in life go, we've got nothing to talk about. The children became everything. Even good things when they take priority over the spouse can unravel.

It violates that expression of love with all that I am and all that I have I honour you.

[20 : 01] And it's destructive. And I think that's a small taste of the horror of the golden calf. God wants an exclusive all-consuming relationship and when something else comes in and takes central place it's spiritual adultery.

It's giving to something else what belongs only to God. And here we see the problem that idolatry creates because a jealous God who wants all of us idolatry provokes him to anger to wrath.

Chapter 32 verse 10 he says to Moses let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them in order that I may make a great nation of you.

He's ready to start again with Moses. Idolatry provokes a jealous God to wrath. He's so committed to an exclusive love relationship he's angry when we turn away from him.

Isn't that the first three chapters of Romans? The problem is the wrath of God. here in Exodus we see God's solution but it's only a pattern.

[21 : 43] Moses is a pattern of what Jesus would actually accomplish. How is the wrath of God removed?

Look at verse 14 of chapter 32 and the Lord relented from the disaster that he's spoken of bringing on his people. That word relented is about taking away his anger.

He only gives a partial judgment. He doesn't start again with Moses and what averts God's wrath? Did the people make it up to God? No. What averted God's wrath was Moses.

one righteous man interceding for the people. His prayer interceding for his people.

That's what gets rid of the wrath of God. A mediator turning away God's wrath. I don't know about you but I find that really humbling because when I look at the reason why God has saved me, it has nothing to do with me.

[22 : 56] It has everything to do with one righteous man interceding for me, interceding for us. But Moses is only a pattern.

Moses could only wish that he could be blotted out of God's book, God's record of his people so that his people were forgiven. He could only wish he was blotted out.

He says that perhaps I can make atonement for your sin. He's just a pattern. There's a tension left in Exodus that isn't resolved until Jesus comes. There's no perhaps anymore.

Romans 3.25 Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

It's not the most elegant word propitiation I don't think but we should love that word. It means turning God's wrath away from us.

[24 : 12] 1 John 2 If anyone does sin we have an advocate with the father Jesus Christ the righteous one he is the propitiation for our sins.

Or 1 John 4 is the definition of love. This is love. Not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Moses could only wish he could delay it but Jesus actually forever takes away the wrath of God because he took it.

He drank the cup of the wrath of God to its dregs. It's gone. We see the pattern here of Moses taking away the wrath fulfilled in the Lord Jesus.

But we also see here this awful episode of the golden calf leads to a really profound beautiful moment.

[25 : 27] One of the closest encounters between God and a human being. Moses doesn't seem to see God's jealousy as dangerous.

He seems to lean into it. He wants to get closer. He wants more. What he prays for is surprising in chapter 33.

The Lord says, okay, because of what you've done, I will still drive out the Canaanites. I will give you the land flowing with milk and honey, but I'm not going to go with you.

My presence won't go with you. I think that's most people's dream religion. I'm going to give you power over your opponents.

I'm going to give you prosperity, milk and honey, the land. I'm going to give you comfort. Moses is mourning. No, don't send us.

[26 : 42] That's not life. That's not glory. If your presence doesn't come with us, don't send us. Moses understands what satisfies the human soul.

as Bo opened this morning. Moses understood that it's not treating God as useful to get something else. We need your presence.

If a man called off an engagement with a woman when he found out that she all her riches were gone and she's in debt and he's like, oh, well, let's just call it off then.

How would she feel? Gutted, right? He just loved me for my money. Isn't that how we treat God? When things aren't going well, God isn't useful to some other end.

Moses understands that God's presence satisfies the human soul. Otherwise, his prayer, I don't know, it doesn't make sense otherwise. Moses is treating God as beautiful for his own sake.

[28 : 14] That's why he prays, show me your glory. He wants to see more of this God. God. When we find something beautiful, most people find, I think all people find the ocean, right?

You look at the ocean, this vast beautiful sight, or we go to the blue mountains and look at those Kenyans. You're not thinking, what can I get out of this?

You're just staring at it because it's just so beautiful for its own sake. But when you find something beautiful, it's not just pleasure in it for its own sake, but it also just somehow pushes you out of yourself.

It fills life with meaning, doesn't it? It's pleasurable for its own sake. It's not just useful, and it just makes life meaningful.

That's what beautiful things do. And I think that's what Moses is praying for here. He understands that God himself is what satisfies the human soul, as beautiful, not just useful.

[29 : 30] He's experienced it. Every time he talked to God face to face, he was glowing. It talks about his face was beaming light. He's experienced it.

He understands that God's jealousy to be exclusively loved and enjoyed for his own sake is not a bad thing. That fills the human soul.

nothing else can satisfy what we were made for than to have the blazing glory of the universe look at you and go, I want you, I invite you in, look at me and enjoy me.

God's jealousy to be exclusively loved is his commitment to satisfy our souls with himself.

the glory Moses saw was only a taste of what you and I get to see today.

[30 : 56] What did Moses see? He saw words. I know that kind of doesn't make sense but when the Lord had all his goodness pass in front of him, what we're told is, whatever that experience was, what we're told repeatedly is the Lord proclaimed the name of the Lord.

He proclaimed. We have access to his glory in his word. The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love to thousands, and forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty.

What Moses saw is that God is all forgiving. That gives us confidence to come to him. All three words for sin are mentioned.

transgression, iniquity, and sin. I hope that gives you confidence that there is no sin that he can't forgive.

He's trying to say it as clearly as he can to assure us he's abounding in forgiveness. He's the self-sufficient flame. I'll be gracious to whom I'll be gracious.

[32 : 29] He's abounding. There's no limit. All sin, it gives us confidence to come to him, to draw near. But I'm sure you notice the tension here.

He won't clear the guilty. What Moses saw is this tension, all his goodness. He's all forgiving, but he can't just be a president, give a presidential pardon that removes all the guilt and no consequences.

He can't do that. He's got to be just. There's a tension here that isn't resolved. Again, until we get to the Lord Jesus Christ.

He only saw his back, Moses. It was a faint outline. We get to look at his face. when we look at the cross. There we see at the cross all God's jealousy.

All that wrath that poured out on his son. And when we look at the cross, we see the lengths he would go to to possess us, to have our heart.

[33 : 56] That's a gracious God who would go to that length to put up with my idols so that he could satisfy my soul with himself, that he would even send his son to the cross.

he's that committed to be present.

He's that committed to possess all of our hearts. And so I think it just calls us to not be, not cling to our idols.

idols. The cross attracts us that we can bring our idols to him and not be afraid that he will reject us. All his wrath has already been taken away in his son.

It attracts us because whatever idol you're clinging to, whatever is more important to you than God, it will fade. it can't last.

[35 : 04] It destroys intimacy with God, it destroys marriages, it destroys churches, it destroys relationships. Don't hang on to that. Come to the cross and be satisfied in him.

Jealousy of God is not repulsive. It's beautiful because he wants us to be satisfied in him. And he sent his son to achieve that.

Will you pray with me? Let's pray. Father, we're not as sorry as we should be for clinging on to created things and making them the centre of our life as we ought to.

Lord, I pray that you would loosen our attraction to whatever that important thing is by the cross of your son, that you would convince our hearts that what we're looking for in created things is actually found in you.

Lord, only you can move our hearts to that. I pray for each one of us and I pray as a church that you would continually break down idols so that we can have you as our lasting treasure.

[36 : 36] Lord, thank you for the hope that we will see you one day face to face. face. I pray that that hope will help us get ready for that day. I pray this in Jesus' name.
Amen. Amen.