

The Blame Game

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[3 : 38] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

When Moses saw that the people had broken loose, for Aaron had let them break loose, the derision of their enemies, then Moses stood at the gate of the camp and said, Who's on the Lord's side? Come to me. And all the sons of Levi gathered around him.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for this time now to be in your word. Just weekend and week out, how we have gone through the book of Exodus. Events, stories, details that happened so many years ago, and yet it speaks directly into our lives today. It is just as relevant now. For your word is sharper than two-edged sword. It is alive. So come and speak to us now. Through your word we pray, and I pray it in Jesus' name. And God's people said, amen. Amen. You can be seated. It's not my fault. Those were the words of Susan Smith as she faced a South Carolina parole board just a few months ago back in November. Some of you may actually remember Susan. Susan was the woman back in 1994 that was convicted of murder when she buckled her two sons, Alex, age three, and Michael, 14 months. She buckled them in her car and rolled the car into a lake.

Susan was found guilty and convicted to life in prison where she had remained for the past 30 years. Now, originally, Susan denied anything to do with the murder of her two boys. She blamed it instead on a carjacking. She said that someone came and stole her car while she was stopped at a red light. Now, the investigators knew that Susan's story didn't really line up. First of all, most carjackers just want the car. So why did they let her go, but they didn't let her boys go? Not to mention, because carjackers really want the car, why would you steal the car and then just drive it in the lake? And when Susan named what stoplight, what red light she was at, it was a specific red light that would have only been red if another car was coming, and she told the police there were no other vehicles around.

Finally, after 30 years at her parole hearing, Susan, through tears, finally acknowledged and apologized for murdering her boys. But what was interesting is that Susan said at her parole, it wasn't my fault.

[7 : 02] She blamed the murder on her mental health. Now, while no one here, I don't think, would deny the real struggle of mental health. That's a real thing. But for Susan, it was just one more excuse in a pattern of shifting the blame. Because during her 30 years in prison, there were numerous other disciplinary actions that she faced. There were encounters with the guards, there was self-harm, possession of drugs, giving personal contact information of her family members to the producer of her documentary. And at her parole, when she was questioned on all these different disciplinary issues, she said, quote, I just trusted the wrong people. On every single count of misconduct, Susan said, quote, it's not my fault. Reminds me of a country song. Doesn't shock anybody. Reminds me of a country song by Brothers Osborne that says, blame the X for the drinking and the drinking for the X.

That's real good country lyrics right there, right? Blame the X on the drinking and the drinking on the X. Blame the two-for-one tequilas for whatever happens next. Blame my reason on my name. Blame my name on my reason. Blame my lack of knowing better on public education. Blame smoke on the fire. Blame fire on the smoke.

Blame the fight on the bouncer who couldn't take a joke. But it ain't my fault. Every single one of us, Faith family, everybody here tonight has experienced someone that refuses to take responsibility for anything. Anybody know that? Don't point, okay? How many of you had that kid that was always blaming their brother or always blaming their sister? It was always somebody else's fault. How many of you were that student in school that always had a reason why you didn't have your homework? How many of you work with one of those employees that always has an excuse for why they're running late? I'm not making this up.

I once had a staff member tell me that the reason why they were late to the office is their quiet time with God ran long. What are you supposed to say about that? Will you tell God to hurry it up next time, right? We know these people that blame everybody. It's always somebody else's fault. I mean, ask any Republican, oh no, what's the reason for all the problems in America? They will gladly tell you it's the Democrats. And the Democrats will gladly tell you it's the Republicans. You ask any team or any fan whose team loses why their team lost, they will gladly tell you it's because of the refs.

Ask any teenager why they have so many problems with life. Well, they'll gladly tell you it's their numb-num parents. Ask any Christian why they're not growing in their faith, and they'll say, it's because my pastor is so boring. Watch it. Watch it. It ain't my fault. It's the blame game.

[10 : 32] The blame game. You've played it. Others have played it. And it is a game that has been going on for a very, very long time. Look all the way back in Genesis. You know this. What happens in Genesis, in Genesis chapter 3, beginning at verse 8. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man saying, where are you?

And by the way, it's not because God doesn't know where Adam is. He wants Adam to know where Adam is. And he said, I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked.

That's how we say it in Tennessee, right? And I hid myself. And he said, well, who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten the tree of which was commanded of you not to eat? And the man said, you know what goes on here? Say this with me. The woman. Well, it's the woman you gave to be with me.

She gave me the fruit to eat, and I ate. And then God turns to the woman and says, well, what is this that you have done? And the woman said, say it, the serpent deceived me, and I ate.

It's not my fault. It's the woman. It's the serpent. It's the blame game. And it goes on all the time.

[12 : 02] It's the government's fault, and it's the teacher's fault, and it's the officer's fault, and it's my husband's fault, and it's the whiskey's fault. It's anybody but me.

Faith family, I am not suggesting, so do not misunderstand what I'm saying. I am not suggesting that people are never at fault, and I'm certainly not suggesting that there are not times when other people are to blame. We obviously know that's true. Amen? What I am addressing here, in fact, what the text of Scripture is addressing here is that tendency that every single one of us has, which is to put the blame on someone else. That's exactly what happens here in Exodus chapter 32.

Now, upon being informed by God of Israel's idolatry, Moses puts his tray table up and begins to descend down the mountain. And on his way down, he meets up with Joshua, who, unlike Israel, has been waiting patiently on Moses. And as they begin to make their way down, they hear this loud voice. Now, Joshua, being a military man, is trying to process what this noise is. It sounds like a noise of war.

But the problem is, it doesn't sound like the chanting of victory, and it doesn't sound like the cry of defeat. And as they get closer, they realize there's not a war that is broken out. Israel is dancing, which means whoever the Israelites are, they're not Baptists. Okay, we at least know that much, because Baptists don't dance. Look at verse 18. Look at verse 18. My Baptist joke for the night. But he said, is not the sound of shouting of victory or the sound of defeat, but the sound of singing that I hear.

And as soon as they came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot. And he threw the tablets out of his hand and broke them at the foot of the mountain. Now, can you even begin to comprehend what I just read? I mean, certainly if you were with us last week or if you watched online, like you understand that there's a disconnect here, right? Moses and Joshua come down the mountain and they find Israel dancing. In other words, they have just given God the ultimate spiritual slap in the face by worshiping his gifts instead of him. And Israel's response is this.

[14 : 45] It's fun to stay at the YMCA. Come on, you can do it. Everybody, come on, you know this dance. Oh, listen, thank whatever you want. That's the best dance ever. Amen?

So Israel's dancing. They're just having a good old time. In fact, go back earlier in chapter 32 and verse 4, you see something similar. When he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made the golden calf, he said, hey, these are your gods, oh Israel, the ones that brought you out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it and Aaron made a proclamation and said, well, tomorrow we'll have a feast of the Lord. And look what they do. They rose up early the next day. They offer burnt offerings and peace offerings.

And the people sat down and ate and drank and rose up to play. Do you see what's going on here? It's actually something very, very, very serious. Something that we should give much attention to.

Notice it on the screen. Faith family, sometimes we can become so comfortable with our idols that we don't even consider them idols. It's a good place for an amen, right? You haven't already zoned out, have you? Sometimes we get so comfortable with the idolatry in our life that we don't even realize them as the idols that they are. Israel is dancing. Israel's having a party.

Israel's having a good old time. They have no concept whatsoever as to the idolatry that they have just been involved in. To them, it's just a cow. Remember I told you last week that the cow was not like a random selection. The cow actually went back to Egypt. It was a symbol of the Egyptian god Apis, the god of prosperity and strength. And so Israel, as we talked about, is they're relapsing back to what they've known. They've known this kind of worship. They've been comfortable with this kind of worship for a very long time. They're familiar with it. They're as familiar with that as we are going to a sporting event. I mean, we wouldn't see that as idolatry.

[17 : 11] We wouldn't see that as an act of worship. Sure looks like worship. It might be something as simple as going to a restaurant and enjoying really good food. You would say, but this is sports.

It's just food. But listen to me. Listen, listen. Are you with me? Listen. Why do most addicts refuse to admit their addicts? Because they see their addiction as a normal part of their life?

They don't think they have a problem. They don't see it as anything wrong. It's just money. Everybody needs that. It's just family. Family is a good thing. It's just success. I mean, who wants to be a loser? In other words, we have these things that can so easily become the very thing we live for or the thing that gives us ultimate meaning and purpose or or ultimate satisfaction in life. And if we're not careful, faith family, listen to me. We will dance around our idols having no idea just how serious the addiction is. Israel is completely disconnected. It's like the condition alexithema. I don't know if you've ever heard of that condition, but alexithema is the condition where people are emotionally dead or emotionally numb. They have no capacity whatsoever to feel. I was reading an article specifically on this and one man said this, who had this condition, said this about the birth of his son, the birth of his son. He said, quote, you know how many parents say the first time they looked at their kid, they were overcome with joy and affection? I didn't feel anything at all. And then he said this about his own wedding day. He said, quote, it was a mechanical production completely clear of joy, happiness, and love.

Israel has become completely numb to the spiritual reality of her idolatry. And when Moses sees this, he loses his ever loving mind. Pick it up in verse 19. And as soon as they came near the camp and they saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. Moses is madder than a piano player in a marching band. You'll get that later. All right.

He is furious. He's like the character anger in the movie Inside Out. Let me at him! Moses is burning hot with anger, but his anger here is a righteous anger. He's angry at Israel's idolatry against Yahweh. And he does two very, very important things. I'll just mention them briefly first, is he breaks the tablets. Do you know what that's a sign of? It's a sign of Israel breaking the covenant they had with Yahweh. The covenant that we made at Sinai. The covenant that you had with God.

[20 : 49] You have broken that. And you've broken it right here in the very same place where the covenant was made. The second thing Moses does is he takes the idol and he burns it down and he grinds it up and he makes Israel drink it. Why? Because he wants them to taste the bitterness of their idolatry. Israel is completely disconnected. They see no blame whatsoever in what they've done. They're just dancing and have a good old time. They do not think they've done anything wrong. So Moses now turns to Aaron because if Israel's not going to take the blame, well surely Aaron will. Pick it up in verse 21.

Moses said to Aaron, what did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them? And Aaron said, well let not the anger of my Lord burn hot. You know the people, they are set on evil.

This is the classic example of the blame game, right? I mean if you want an example of how to avoid responsibility, Aaron is that example. He does three very, very specific things. Y'all still with me? I'm having a great time. I hope you are. Three things that Aaron does. Classic example of the blame game. Here's the first thing he does. He minimizes the situation. He minimizes the situation.

What he does here is, in fact, the phrase that we just read in the verse is, let not your anger burn hot. Let me translate that for you. The translation would be this. Moses, chill brother.

Hey, you're taking this a little bit too seriously. Just chill out. Don't overreact. It's just a cow. You know, one of the ways that we avoid blame is we tend to minimize the offense. Sure, I failed the class, but you know what? So did all the other students, right? It wasn't really that big of a deal. We just kind of minimize what the situation is. And then the second thing he does after minimizing the situation is he maximizes everybody else's responsibility. He starts with Moses. He says to Moses, in fact, what Aaron does is he quotes what's earlier in chapter 32. He quotes to Moses what the people said about Moses, which was what? Well, we don't even know what's become of him. We don't even know where he is. He's taking so long. Here's what I think Aaron is doing. I think Aaron is saying this,

[23 : 35] Moses, you know, if you'd have been here sooner, none of this would have happened. There wouldn't have even been a golden cow had you not been late. It's not my fault, Moses. It's your fault. Where were you? You see? And then after minimizing the situation, maximizing Moses's responsibility, he turns it on Israel. The next thing he says is, and by the way, you know how evil the Israelites are.

Faith family, is this not Genesis on repeat? It's the woman. It's the serpent. It's, you know, Moses, you know what it's like to be in ministry. Church people are the worst. Oh, church people, they're the worst. I know, Aaron. I totally understand why you did this. That's right, because it's all Israel's fault. Aaron would make a great politician. Amen? I mean, Aaron would do well in the U.S. government, right? It's everybody else's fault but mine. So he minimizes the situation. He maximizes Moses' responsibility and Israel's responsibility, and if those two things don't work, just make something up.

This is hilarious, right? This is hilarious. Look at verse, I mean, it's not ultimately spiritually hilarious, but in practicality is, verse 23, they said to me, make us gods, and as for this Moses, the man that brought us out of the land of Egypt, we don't even know what's become of him.

So you're not, Moses, you're not going to believe what happened. What happened was, you see, what happened was, is that I had them give me all the gold, and I threw it in the fire, and boom, a calf came out. I mean, ta-da! I mean, you really should have been here to see it, Moses. It was quite the sight. I just threw the gold in, and this cow just walked out. It was so amazing. Now, look at the cow, or something like this, right? You look at that, and you're like, that just doesn't happen, right?

You don't have something like that just walk out of a fire. I think Moses is a lot like, somebody say, preach, preacher. I think Moses is a lot like people who deny the intelligent design of the universe.

[25 : 58] You expect me to look at the design of this universe and think, boom, it just happened? You really, you want me to look at the design of all of the universe and think that that just randomly happened by chance? I don't know about you, but when I look at this thing, it sure looks like somebody carved it with a graving tool. Sure looks like there's design, Aaron. You see, Aaron here is trying to play this off. In fact, here's a good video of what Aaron is really skilled at.

Here he is. He's like the best dodgeball player you've ever seen, right? He is dodging and weaving and ducking responsibility at every single level. Now, guess what we're not going to do at Faith Family. We've had a little bit of fun with Aaron, but we're not going to look down our noses at Aaron.

Do you know why? Because of the truth of the matter is, when it comes to our own idolatry, we are just like Israel and just like Aaron. We far more often deny the seriousness of our idolatry than we do own it. Amen? Four of you, okay? The rest of you, I hope you're listening, okay? And convicted, right? We're just like this. Come on, it's just a cow. It's just money. It's just loving my kids.

But man, if we're not careful, we're not careful. We are failing to assess just how attached these things are to our heart. And we would be quick to blame or dodge the blame in order to take responsibility for our idolatry. Now, Moses is now going to give the people of Israel an opportunity to either be on the idol side or be on Yahweh's side. Look at what he says in verse 25.

Then Moses saw the people broken loose because Aaron had let them break loose. And Moses stood at the gate of the camp and said, okay, who's on the Lord's side? Come to me, all the sons of Levi.

[28 : 15] Levi. And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. We're not going to take the time to go through what happens here, but essentially, and I think this is a gift of God's mercy, God is going to wean out those that want to be on the side of the idol. Moses draws a line in the sand. You're either on Yahweh's side or you're on the idol side. There's roughly, different commentators estimate there's roughly about 600,000 men, maybe here. And we know of at least from this text that 3,000 of those 600,000 men will die by the sword because they refuse to be on Yahweh's side. Instead, they remain committed to their idol. God here is weeding out and cleansing the camp of idolatry. Now, the question would remain for those that fell by judgment of the sword. What about the other 597,000? I mean, they still committed idolatry. They may have in that moment of Moses asking the question said, yes, I'm going to be on

Yahweh's side, but they still have not acknowledged their idolatry. So what hope is there for them? Something must be done for Israel as well as Aaron's sin. God cannot and should not turn a blind eye to this rebellion that is happening here. So here's my question for you, Faith Family. The question is, for a people who feel no blame, like Israel, and a man who accepts no blame, like Aaron, what is the hope for them? What is the ultimate answer for people like us who refuse to accept the blame of our idolatry? And here's the answer. You ready? You need a scapegoat. You need a scapegoat.

Here's what I mean. What you need is someone or something who will take the blame for you. Notice what Moses does, or at least what he tries to do. Verse 31.

Moses returned to the Lord and said, alas, the people have sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin, but if not, please blot who? You fell asleep, didn't you? Please blot me out of your book, that you have written. Do you see what's happening here? What's happening here is that Moses, now listen to me very closely. Moses, in this story, not all the stories in Exodus, but in this story, Moses is not to blame. Moses is innocent. He had no part of the idol worship that was taking place at the bottom of the mountain. He was innocent of that. And so, what's happening here, in fact, this phrase, blot me out, is what should be happening to Israel. In fact, earlier in chapter 32,

God threatens to consume, to wipe out Israel, but instead he relents. You remember that from last week. So, this is what's actually happening. Focus in. Notice this. Moses asked God to do to him what should have been done to Israel. Do you see that? Moses is saying, put it on me. Blot me out. Before you do this to the people, do it first to me. Moses here is essentially offering himself as a sacrifice for Israel's sin. Moses knows that Israel won't take the blame, and Aaron won't take the blame, so someone must. And Moses is willing to take the blame for something he did not do on behalf of the people.

[32 : 30] You are well trained here at Faith Family, right? Some of you are five theological miles ahead of me. Who's this a picture of? Are you seeing how every single week throughout every single story, it is foreshadowing and proclaiming the gospel? This is a picture of Jesus. This is a picture of our mediator, Christ, who is innocent of any and all sin, who never committed idolatry, and yet what did Jesus do for us? He absorbed the blame our sin deserves. Listen to 2 Corinthians 5, verse 21.

For our sake he made him to be sin, who knew no sin. Why? So that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Isaiah 53, verse 5. But he, Christ, was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. There's hope for everybody in this room who refuses to accept the responsibility of our own spiritual idolatry. And that hope is Jesus Christ who took the blame for you. That, dear friends, is the gospel. As Christ absorbs the blame we deserve. But now notice something here very important, and then we're done. We're almost done. Notice that God denies, in verse 33, God denies Moses' request.

He will not let Moses be the sacrifice for the people's sins. Because here's why. While Moses may be innocent in this particular story, Moses is not innocent. You with me? He may not have committed the idolatry in Exodus 32, but if you've been with us for the last 31 chapters, you know Moses has had a fair share of his own shortcomings and sins and idolatry as well. Amen? Moses cannot ultimately be the sacrifice he wants to be, which makes this powerful point. And here it is. Moses can't do what only Jesus can.

Moses cannot do what only Jesus can. Listen to me, faith family tonight. There is only one true scapegoat. There is only one true person that can take your blame. Listen to me. It is not your husband.

It is not your wife. It is not your family. It is not your boss. And it is not your pastor. It is only Jesus Christ our Lord. He is the one that absorbed on himself the blame we deserve. There is no other substitute for your sin. As I close this evening, this is what I would say in response to what should we take away from this message. It would be easy to stop with, well, you should just accept responsibility for your sin. You should accept your responsibility for your idolatry. Don't be an Israel. Don't be an Aaron. Be someone who's willing to say, yes, I am a sinner. I have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And that would be true. And that would be biblical. But that would leave you enslaved.

[36 : 23] Because the answer tonight is not ultimately, don't be an Aaron. The answer is, look to Jesus. Because it is not enough for you to say, I accept responsibility for my sin. Do you know why?

Because it doesn't ultimately matter. You can't ultimately solve your sin. You can't be your own sacrifice. Your taking responsibility does not free you. Jesus does. So sure, don't be an Aaron.

Don't be an Israel and accept responsibility for your sin. But far more than that, find the freedom in knowing that Jesus is the one who ultimately took the responsibility of your sin upon the cross.

That is when you will find the freedom of the gospel. Amen? Faith family, we are living in a world of Susan Smith's. We are surrounded by people. And you know it. And many of them are in the mirror.

People who want to blame someone else. But today's message is not about Susan. And it's not about Aaron. And it's not about Israel. It's about us. Because the reality is, you and I are Susan Smith.

[37 : 47] No, we have not committed the terrible crime of murdering children. But it was our spiritual adultery, our spiritual idolatry that crucified the Son of God. It was our sin that nailed Him there.

And whether or not you want to admit it, the cross is our fault. The cross is my fault. The cross is your fault. But the good news of the gospel is because Jesus willingly took our place, God will never blame you. And all God's people said, amen. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. God, thank you so much for the truth of Exodus 32. It is both convicting and freeing. The reality is we are far more like Israel and Aaron than we often would want to admit, wanting to blame everybody else but ourselves.

And while yes, we need to not be like Aaron and we need to accept the responsibility of our idolatry, the ultimate hope of the gospel is not in that. The ultimate hope of the gospel is the one Moses points us to, which is the one who was made sin, though he knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God. That's the hope of the gospel, that Jesus took our transgressions, that he bore our iniquities. And because of that, for those who are in Christ, there is now no condemnation.

God, you do not blame us. For Christ took the blame for us. And we remember that now as we enter into a time of communion where we think about the broken body and the spilled blood of Jesus taking on and absorbing all of our idolatry, all of our sin, as it was nailed to the cross and finished for good.

So Lord, help us now as we enter into this time of reflection and worship. And we pray it in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.