

Moses The Mediator

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[0 : 00] Let's turn for a short time this evening, waiting on God, to the passage we read in Exodus chapter 32, looking at some of the features from the passage that we read, and indeed the whole chapter, but particularly those aspects of it that were in these two passages we read, the beginning and the final part of the chapter.

If you asked throughout what's known as the church in our country, what connections you could make between this passage and where we're at today, I'm sure the response would be that, well, there really aren't very many connections.

This is really a long, long time ago. It contains things which perhaps might even be suggested are not to be believed literally, and in any case, even if they were, they're of little relevance to the world in which we live today because things have moved on so much.

How could we possibly say there are lots of connections between this passage and what it records for us and where we are today in our society or in the church, indeed, in our land?

Of course, that would be a grave mistake because, as I hope we'll see this evening, there are many connections, some of which we'll mention. There are many others that can be traced out for yourselves. The first thing we notice in the passage is how quickly the people turned to idolatry.

[1 : 28] How quickly the people turned to idolatry. When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, Up, make us gods who shall go before us.

As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. Moses had been away for some time, and here are the people gathering together.

There's a really ominous emphasis there when you read there that they gathered themselves together. That's often in the Old Testament language for really plotting seriously about something.

And that's exactly what they were doing. They were gathering together a momentum to come to replace Moses, or to at least say to Aaron, There's no point in waiting for Moses. We don't know what's happened to him, so let's do something about it.

And so this is what then Aaron's advice was to them. Now this was a real test for Aaron, a real test of leadership for Aaron, and very often in the circumstances of the church, we come against tests for the leadership of the church, not just for ministers, but for those who are in eldership or in the leadership of the church in that sense, and perhaps other ways prominent in the church as well, because there are always going to be situations where we're tempted to actually go away from the things that God himself has set very clearly for us in his word.

[2 : 55] And the test that was set for Aaron here, when he was told about his brother Aaron being away, brother Moses being away, and come on, get up, let's do something about this.

Well, he failed that test, of course, and he failed it pretty totally. And if you go back up to verses 22 to 24, you can see something of the absurdity.

And of course, the Bible often presents us with, especially in the context of idolatry, with the absurdity of what's happening, and the absurdity of idolatry, and the absurdity of going from the path that God has set out.

Verses 22 there, where Moses, when he came down and said to Aaron, what did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them? And Aaron said, let not the anger of my Lord burn hot.

As you know, the people, they are set on evil. For they said to me, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.

[3 : 56] So I said to them, let anyone who have gold take it off. So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.

See, he's covering himself, of course, firstly by blaming the people. It wasn't really me. They made me do it. But then he's really trying to cover the reality of what happened. We read earlier in the passage there, near the beginning, Aaron took the gold, the rings that had been given to him, and he fashioned it with a graving tool.

It was a deliberate act of creating something. And here he is now trying to cover himself and saying, well, people made me do it. Anyway, I just threw it into the fire, and there came out this calf.

What was he trying to achieve? Was he actually thinking that he could pull the wool over Moses' eyes? Surely not. He's just desperately trying to cover his tracks. But that's not what we're really concerned with, but to try and work out, where do we stand in relation to that today?

What sort of lesson do we take from that? Well, on this particular point, you can see that people turned so soon to idolatry, how soon they changed from what was just a short time before that under Moses leading them into this journey that they were on to the Promised Land.

[5 : 16] Now they've turned aside from faithfulness to God and from the worship of God in its purity to idolatry. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones once said, and it was talking about theological institutions particularly, but it's equally applicable to congregations or to churches, he said that every institution has the potential to turn into the opposite of itself.

Every institution has the potential to turn into the opposite of itself. All that's needed is you depart from God's truth. And when you depart from God's truth, the further you go, the more you're turning into the opposite of what you began with when you were faithful to God's truth.

You see that in the history of our own church and the free church. In 1843, which is very rightly marked as such a significant point, not just in church history, but in Scottish history, where the disruption created the Free Church of Scotland.

But very soon, at least within a few decades, it had changed into something very different because they had started to import teachings from Germany, liberal theology, and a critical analysis of the Bible, and leading to doubt in the inspiration of the Bible, and things like that.

And all of those things that formed that liberal theology began to seep into the church, and then it began to be encouraged, and students were sent to really learn this new theology, and to actually then practice it in their preaching, and in their pastorates.

[6 : 51] What happened? Well, the church then lost its moorings. It lost its confidence in the Bible. It lost its confidence in this being the truth of God. And that's why, by 1900, all that was left after a union with the United Presbyterian Church was a very small group compared to what you had in the earlier part of the century.

All to do with departing from the truth of God, from confidence in the Bible, and what it says in regard to God's actions, God's ways, what is miraculous in the way God brings miracles to be achieved by Him.

All of that is doubted by liberal theologians, by liberal theology, and when you let that seep, and other kinds of deviations from the truth seep into the church, and people begin to follow them, you're turning into the opposite of where you began, and what you were.

Now it's the same for an individual as well. And that has been happening all down through history, from the time of Moses, and even before that onwards to the present day.

And that of course shows us our need for things which really are not very popular today, as to be said. The need for watchfulness and to guard our lives and to guard the teaching of the church and to pray against temptations that will lead us away from those precious truths of God.

[8 : 17] All of that is absolutely necessary and always will be, as long as the church is the church in the world. So they very soon departed. They very soon changed from the way that they were on and from the thinking they had.

But how far did the change take them? Well, it took them, firstly, to idolatry. Because what they did was fashioned a calf. Now, it's important that we see just exactly what they made or what Aaron fashioned it into.

It's not an accident that it actually happened to be a calf that was created and fashioned or engraven for them. It could be that that's going back to Egypt, to the pagan cults that you found in Egypt where animals such as calves featured prominently in some of the paganistic beliefs and rituals in Egypt.

It could also be, as some commentators suggest, even going back beyond that to the kind of paganism before they came to Egypt, even before they left Ur of the Chaldees where Abraham was called from that place of idolatry to follow the Lord.

In any case, it doesn't really matter what you say, but it's going back to paganism and it's going back to those things that are contrary to the way in which God had delivered them from that and brought them to walk in His ways.

[9 : 43] And the next step after idolatry is immorality. Now, you define immorality in the way that God defines it.

One of the obvious reasons why the Bible is really being set aside today by many, even by many who are, as they say, practicing Christians or in the Church of God is that they don't particularly like what it says about the way and the lifestyle that people ought to have.

When you take the Bible's teaching on what a moral life is, then obviously if you discard that or adjust that or suggest it's not any longer relevant, then you're going to have a very different lifestyle, a very different view of morality to what God defines as morality.

Well, the immorality is actually closely following the idolatry. And it's very often like that. These are your gods, O Israel, he said to the people. He built an altar before it.

He made the 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.

[10 : 58] And that sounds rather innocuous. Sounds rather gentle. They ate and drink, rose up to play. But that term rose up to play has sexual connotations.

It has the immorality of sexual immorality about it. And you can actually see that even from the point of view that Moses takes these very words from this very context in 1 Corinthians 10, and verse 7, where he's talking about the immorality of sexual immorality, where he's counseling the church in Corinth against those things and trying to actually get them to see differently to what they are saying about these practices.

And this is what he says. This is, for our example, he says, among other things, that the people rose up to eat and drink and rose up to play. It's obviously something that includes the kind of pagan practice where sexual immorality was part of the religious ritual.

See how soon the people had actually gone back to the practices of paganism, including that sort of orgiastic sexual deviancy that paganism often entails.

Now that's, again, where we come up against the need to actually really put this to our own age and find relevance in it and find connections.

[12 : 22] Because today, we're really faced with the idea that we have to really adapt our thinking to the present age. And because we have to adapt our thinking to the present age, so we need to reinterpret the Bible and what it says, especially on those issues.

And we need to actually re-understand our Bibles because when we do so, we change certain things even in terms of what our ancestors believed and what our forefathers believed about the Christian faith and the Christian behavior that goes along with it.

But you're still left with Christianity, we're told. You can still be a Christian and accept all of these changes. Well, just let me refer there to verse 4.

Verse 4 is saying, 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.

And then if you go to verse 5, When Aaron saw this, he built an altar and he said, Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.

[13 : 33] That's rather strange, isn't it? He's saying, These are your gods to this calf. And it is plural. And then in verse 5, Next day shall be a feast to the Lord.

It's really saying, in effect, that, Yes, we've done this. We've done this because Moses is away. We don't know what's happened to him. We've done this because this is a new context for us. We've got to do something about this.

So we've fashioned this golden calf. And these are our gods that have brought us out of Egypt. But nothing's really essentially changed. Tomorrow is going to be a feast to the Lord.

Tomorrow we're back thinking of our covenant God. But we can do it through this golden calf. You see, that's what they're saying. Yes, we've made this golden calf. We see this golden calf. We've built an altar before it.

We've said, These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. But tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord. That's exactly where we are today in many respects.

[14 : 36] The idea that you can refashion God and your thinking of God and still be left with the Lord. and still be left with Christianity in its essence in the salvation that's in Christ.

Well, if you change as people do change and as some evangelicals even today will say, we need to change our thinking of such things as the atonement.

Such things as what the death of Christ really is about and what sort of death it was. When you think of the view of personal morality even, when evangelicals tell you, yes, but you've got to accept the gendered changes and you've got to accept the various ways in which that affects human relationships and you've got to really import that into the Bible nowadays.

In other words, they're still saying, you know, you can change so much of what used to be seen as essential and not just essential but something that is really not to be manipulated or changed or tampered with.

You're still left really essentially with what being a Christian is about. And some will even go so far even though they deny that this is what they were doing because they're reinterpreting the teaching of Christ.

[16 : 02] But for us, when you look at the teaching of Christ and the plain teaching of Christ on such things as human relationships and marriage and so on, essentially what people are saying is, well, even if it contradicts what Jesus himself said, we still need this for today.

Well, that's reverting to Exodus 32. That's just essentially going back to the same situation where you're finding at the same time the attempt to say, these are your gods.

It's quite acceptable. We've done this now, Moses, the way. It's a new context. We need to do something that brings in a new element. But tomorrow is a feast to the Lord.

We still have the Lord. We're still serving your covenant, God. But it's now through this golden calf. Not only did they change very quickly to this path, but the change took them firstly to idolatry and very soon then to immorality.

And that's where we're at today, friends. That's why we've got to really insist on in our own lives, in our own witness, that this Bible is not something that you can just play fast and loose with.

[17 : 19] Look at Moses' reaction when he came down from the mountain. Of course, the Lord actually said to him, verse 7, go down. And it's very interesting, for your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt.

Now that's really telling when God says to Moses, these people, they're your people. They're actually his people. They're his covenant people. But he's saying to Moses, just so as to show the gravity of what they've done, God is really saying to them, I'm not going to call them my people at all for now.

Because they're demonstrating something else. They're your people. Go down to them. Or they have corrupted themselves. And as we'll see, when Moses then begins interceding for them, in our quite remarkable and powerful interceding for them, you see how he brings back to God the fact, actually, Lord, they're your God.

They're your people, Lord. Your people, whom you brought out of Egypt. And with boldness and faith, Moses addresses the issue, as we'll see, as one who interceded for the people.

But notice what is happening. When he came down from the mountain, in verse 15, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hands, tablets that were written on both sides, on the front and on the back, they were written.

[18 : 39] The tablets were the work of God. And the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets. And then there's this conversation with Joshua.

In verse 19, when he came down 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.

He took the calf that they had made and burnt it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it in the water and made the people of Israel drink it. Just to demonstrate and reinforce how seriously wrong they were and how contrary they were to the Lord's ways.

But you notice what he did with the two tables or tablets of the stones on which the Ten Commandments were written. He broke them at the foot of the mountain. And some people might suggest that's just in a fit of rage that he just lost a bit of control and smashed the two tablets there and then in his anger.

Well, we're told that he was angry. That's made very plain to us. Moses' anger burned hot. He was indignant. But he's not been rebuked for it.

[19 : 56] Because there is a legitimate form of indignant anger or reaction. It's difficult to do it without sin. Absolutely. It's difficult to actually have anger and not then invade that area where you're involved in sin.

But we're told in Scripture that there are many instances in fact of the Lord's people being indignant with what they're seeing around them or happening in terms of sinfulness or debauchery or idolatry.

And it's right that we should feel in our own day at times when the Lord's name is transgressed so much. When those who are called the Lord's people or call themselves the Lord's people or Christians will actually go so far as to deny the very plain truth that Christ taught.

Of course you're angry about that. You're indignant about that. You don't show it by just flaming up in passion and losing it. What Moses is doing is breaking very deliberately these tablets with the commandments so that the people would see this is what you have done.

you have broken God's covenant. You have broken God's law. You have done something so gravely serious that I have to show you how serious it is by smashing these tablets that were written by God.

[21 : 19] You see he's saying there in the previous part the tablets were the work of God. The writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets. Now you believe that literally.

You take that at face value. Moses didn't write them. God wrote them. God actually engraved the writing on these tablets of stone and gave them to Moses.

And when that's being emphasized here and then it says that Moses actually burned them. Moses realized very well what he was doing. Moses realized very well what he was carrying. He was carrying something unique.

He was carrying two tablets of stone on which God had written his words of covenant with the people and he smashed it to show them this and no less than this is what you've done.

and that's part of our problem today. You change the ground on which we are accepted by God.

[22 : 23] You change the terms that God himself sets as to what is and isn't acceptable to him for a moral lifestyle for Christians and you don't really think that it's all that serious simply because you've reinvented the whole thing as something that is other than what God has written.

And we need to try really as far as possible only God can do this ultimately that God would actually come with a convicting power to show people that when his covenant terms are transgressed and then replaced by something else that's not a small thing.

That's not insignificant. that's hugely serious and attracts nothing less than the displeasure of God.

That's exactly what God said and that's what brings us after Moses' reaction after the people's turning aside to Moses' reaction.

Verse 11 Moses implored the Lord as God. Now you have to set that against verse 10. The Lord's angry with them. The Lord is saying I've seen those people they are a stiff necked people now let me alone.

[23 : 43] That's such an interesting and significant reference by God. What God is saying is let go of me. Moses was an interceder Moses was somebody standing between the people and God.

God knew that Moses would actually as it were lay his hands upon God speaking with all respect and plead with God for the people which is what he did. And he's being put to the test and God is saying to him let me alone.

Leave me alone because I'm going to wax hot in my wrath against this people. I'm going to burn hot against them so that I may consume them. God's name. But then he says so that I may make a great nation of you.

Now Moses is very rightly regarded as one of the greatest men of the Old Testament and indeed of any age of the church. And this is one place where you see that so clearly demonstrated.

Here is the great temptation that Moses faced where God set the situation before him. They've broken the covenant. You're right in saying this is a grievous thing.

[24 : 56] Now leave me alone. I've got you to begin a new chapter with Moses. And I'll begin with you and I'll make of you a great nation. Lesser people would have caved in and said, right Lord, I'm here, let's just go ahead with it.

But Moses knew God so well. And Moses had such a regard for God's covenant promises and God's faithfulness that instead of saying, yes Lord, that's what we'll do, he turns to the Lord and he implored the Lord as God to turn from this anger against his people.

And there are five things where you could compare that, of course, to Jesus. A point to be made there is we can compare that to Jesus in the wilderness and the devil coming to him.

Here is God's mediator, Jesus Christ, his own son in the wilderness and he's come to be tempted by the devil. Why is he being tempted by the devil?

Because the devil is seeking that he will depart from that path of obedience to God that he's on. If you are the son of God, command these stones that they be made bread. That's not the devil saying to Jesus trying to make him doubt that he's the son of God.

[26 : 20] That's not why he's saying if you are the son of God. What he's saying to Jesus is seeing you are the son of God, why shouldn't you make these stones into bread and stop this ridiculous hunger that you're now going through?

You see, Jesus was on that path of testing of obedience to the father, following the course that was set him to complete in this world, and the devil knows that.

And he wants as far as possible to get him out of that and to disqualify him as far as the devil is concerned from being the mediator of God's people. That's really essentially what Moses is facing as well.

Is he going to be the mediator between the people and God, or is he just going to say, well, let's make a new beginning. Start with me. And that's what Moses overcame.

Now there's five things especially in his pleading. I'm just going to mention them and you can follow them out further for yourselves. First of all, he appeals to God's previous working.

[27 : 28] Verse 11, Moses implored the Lord as God 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 with a mighty hand?

Lord, you have done this. You have done this in their experience just in the recent past. Now why should that change? Why should you turn from that to something else? Now you can plead that before the Lord in our circumstances too.

Lord, you have done this in the past. You have done such great things in the past. We need you today as we did as we saw you in the past. We need you to actually turn things around from the way they are.

So why, Lord, why? Why not do this? Why just keep the displeasure that is rightly against us for our sins? But Lord, please turn from that.

Please do as you've done in the past. That's the first point. God's previous working. And then you find God's reputation. God's salvation.

[28 : 32] 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?

See, Moses is concerned that the Egyptians and other pagans around these people of Israel will say about their God and about them as his people had.

We told you so. We told that it was futile trusting in this God of yours. He's left you. He's departed from you. He's changed.

Well, we face that cry on a daily basis, don't we? The futility of trusting in God, of trusting in the Bible as God's true word. You have to face that.

And Moses had to face that. And now he's saying, why should the Egyptians say this? And that's exactly where we're at today, isn't it? As the psalmist said a number of times in the Psalms, why should the heathen say, where is their God?

[29 : 37] Where is your God? Isn't that what people are saying? Where is your God? Where was God when this happened? Where is God today? Isn't he supposed to be looking after his people?

Why do such things then happen to them? Of course, that's in many ways just an excuse for them to continue in unbelief. But we're praying that God will come and manifest his own reputation, his spotless reputation and image, and that he will actually come and turn this wrong view of God so that people will see him for exactly who he is.

Thirdly, he appeals to God's mercy in verse 12. Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people.

One of our great encouragements for prayer is the fact that we know God is merciful. You don't have any greater incentive and confidence or ground of confidence to pray above that.

That God is merciful. That despite the way things may be, and despite what history may show in recent times, and despite the fact that perhaps for a long time we've seen the ungodliness and the atheism and the secularism of our age increasing virtually week after week, the Lord is still merciful.

[31 : 03] And you appeal to that mercy and you pray to God as a merciful God and say, turn Lord, be merciful, relent from a disaster against us.

Fourthly, he appeals to God's covenant promises, or you could say the same thing as God's faithfulness in verse 13. Remember Abraham, Israel, 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.

We appeal to God's faithfulness, to God's faithfulness to his covenant, to his promises, that he will never actually be short of fulfilling his promises.

And as we appeal to God's faithfulness, so it gives us another element in our prayer and our imploring of him as Moses did here. And all the way through the Bible, you'll find that this is actually used again and again by the Lord's people.

Take Isaiah, for example, and in these great prayers of Isaiah, from verse chapter 63 into chapter 64, for example. Just go through them later on for yourselves and see how Isaiah there presses these points to God in prayer, not arrogantly, not in a way that's other than just imploring God as Moses is here, humbly yet believingly, that God is the covenant God of his people, that God's covenant promises are still in place, are still in force, that he's committed to them.

[32 : 37] And that's too what we plead for ourselves. We plead that for our family lives. We plead that for our children who are brought up in the church and who belong to us as covenant children, at least within the humbit of covenant gospel mercies.

Lord, remember, remember, remember, remember, remember your covenant. God himself is addressing us in this way in the Bible.

This is our privilege. How much are we using it? How much are we imploring God? And then, fifthly, there's this great emphasis that God may accept a substitute for the people.

And if you go towards the end of the chapter where we read, the next day Moses said to the people, I will go up to the Lord, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin. So he returned to the Lord and said, alas, this people have sinned a great sin.

They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin. And then he stops there and said, but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.

[33 : 51] And these are remarkable words. You know, we ask the question, who in the Old Testament most represents Christ or is a type or a figure of Christ?

Christ. Is it Joseph? Is it David in his kingship? Is it Solomon in all his grandeur? No, it's actually Moses. Because more than anyone else, Moses in himself contains the elements of kingliness and priestliness and is a prophet to the people.

The three offices of Christ. And he is a type of Christ here as he stands before God, between God and the people. And he says, Lord, if you're not willing to forgive their sin, take me in place of them.

If your wrath has to go out, then let it fall on me. Blot me out of your book. That is, for many reasons, a remarkable statement.

moment that Moses was prepared to say to God, if anyone must die for this sin, let it be me. There is Jesus staring you in the face.

[35 : 12] In this representation of him and Moses, the mediator between this holy God and this sinful, idolatrous people, where Jesus, the Son of God, you could say, is exactly saying the same thing.

if not, blot me out of your book. As Jesus, as it were to God the Father said, if anyone must die for these people, then I shall do it.

Spare them. Let the blow fall upon me. Let me die their death. love. And that surely is another great connection between this passage and our salvation in Christ.

Greater love has no man than this, is what he said himself, that a man lay down his life for his friends. We pray that God will bless to us these thoughts on his word.

We're going to conclude now singing in Psalm number 80A, page 107. And we'll just sing the final three verses, I think, because of the time restriction.

[36 : 32] Psalm 80A, page 107, and at verse 17. Let your hand be placed in blessing on the man at your right hand, on the son of man you've chosen, whom alone you caused to stand.

And a very interesting reference here, we perhaps almost automatically think that he's talking here about Christ at the right hand of God. But if you go back previously to verse 15, where the people are regarded as a vine that God has planted and has become wasted through the way in which they have departed from God, well, tend this vine, he says, your hand is planted, and the son you raised in love.

So it's talking about Israel, the covenant people as the son of God, adopted children of God. And what he's saying now in appealing to God is let your hand be placed in blessing on this man, on this son, on these people at your right hand.

We'll sing these verses. Then in conclusion, let your hand be placed in blessing. let your hand be placed in blessing on the man at your right hand, on the son of man you've chosen, whom alone you has to stand.

then we will not wander from you, turning from you to our shame.

[38 : 14] Strengthen us, revive and heal us, then we'll call upon your name.

look on us, Lord God Almighty, let us see your glory ride, turn us once again towards you,
come and save us, give us light.

at the safe time, I won't go to the door this evening. Excuse me for that, please. And now
may grace and mercy and peace from God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be
with you now and ever more.

Amen.