

Crushing Idols and Communing With God

by Anthony Mathenia

This sermon delves into the story of the Israelites' idolatry with the golden calf, highlighting the dangers of idol worship and the need to crush idols in our lives. It emphasizes the importance of realizing the severity of sin, responding with genuine repentance, and resolving to seek communion with God wholeheartedly. The narrative underscores the consequences of disobedience and the significance of separating from sin to cultivate a close relationship with Christ.

Scripture: Exodus 32:1, Exodus 33:1, Matthew 25:31, Isaiah 59:2, 2 Chronicles 15:13, Psalms 106:19, James 2:10, Mark 9:24, 1 Corinthians 10:11, Hebrews 4:16

Topics: "Idolatry", "Genuine Repentance"

Description

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Transcript

Good evening. I am grateful for the privilege to be with you this evening as well as over the next few days as we consider the truths of God's Word together and have the opportunity to sit under preaching and enjoy fellowship one with another as well. If you have your Bibles open to Exodus chapter 32, I actually want to consider Exodus 32 and 33 this evening.

I'm still a bit undecided about whether or not I want to read the entirety of it now or take it as we come to it. I think we'll read it all now. I think if you'll bear with me, it will benefit the remainder of our time.

Exodus chapter 32, beginning in verse 1. Now, when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, come, make us a God who will go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. Aaron said to them, tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons and your daughters, and bring them to me.

Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. He took this from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf. And they said, this is

your God, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.

Now 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. So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings.

And the people sat down to eat and to drink and rose up to play. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, go down at once for your people whom you've brought up from the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them.

They have made for themselves a molten calf and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, this is your God, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. The Lord said to Moses, I have seen this people and behold, they are an obstinate people. Now then, let me alone that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them.

And I will make of you a great nation. Then Moses entreated the Lord, his God, and said, O Lord, why does your anger burn against your people whom you have bought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, saying with evil intent he brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth? Turn from your burning anger and change your mind about doing harm to your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by yourself and said to them, I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens and all this land of which I've spoken, I will give to your descendants and they shall inherit it forever.

So the Lord changed his mind about the harm which he said he would do to his people. Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets which were written on both sides. They were written on one side and the other.

The tablets were God's work and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets. Now, when Joshua heard the sound of the people, as they shouted, he said to Moses, there is a sound of war in the camp. But he said, it's not the sound of the cry of triumph.

Nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat. But the sound of singing I hear. It came about as soon as Moses came near the camp that he saw the calf and the dancing and Moses's anger burned and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.

He took the calf, which they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink it. Then Moses said to Aaron, what did this people do to you that you have brought such great sin upon them? Aaron said, do not let the anger of my Lord burn. You know the people yourself that they are prone to evil.

For they said to me, make a God for us who will go before us. For this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. I said to them, whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.

So they gave it to me and I threw it into the fire and out came this calf. Now, when Moses saw that the people were out of control for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies, then Moses stood in the gate to the camp and said, whoever is for the Lord, come to me and all the sons of Levi gathered together to him. And he said to them, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, every man of

you put his sword upon his thigh and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp and kill every man, his brother and every man, his friend and every man, his neighbor.

So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed. And about 3000 men of the people fell that day. Then Moses said, dedicate yourselves today to the Lord.

For every man has been against his son and against his brother in order that he may bestow a blessing upon you today. On the next day, Moses said to the people, you yourselves have committed a great sin. And now I'm going up to the Lord.

Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin. Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, alas, this people has committed a great sin and they've made a God of gold for themselves. But now, if you will forgive their sin, and if not, please blot me out from your book, which you have written.

The Lord said to Moses, whoever has sinned against me, I will blot him out of my book. But go now, lead the people where I told you, behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin.

Then the Lord smote the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron had made. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying to your descendants, I will give it. I will send an angel before you and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite.

Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey, for I will not go up in your midst because you are an obstinate people and I might destroy you on the way. When the people heard this sad word, they went into mourning, and none of them put on his ornaments. For the Lord had said to Moses, say to the sons of Israel, you are an obstinate people.

Should I go up in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you. Now therefore, put off your ornaments from you that I may know what I shall do with you. So the sons of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments from Mount Horeb onward.

Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. And it came about, whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent.

Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses. When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent. Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend.

When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent. May God bless his word among us this evening. I would like to consider this topic from these verses that we've read, from chapter 32 and a portion of 33, crushing idols and communing with God.

Crushing idols and communing with God. And unfortunately, that's about all the points you're going to get from me this evening, because I have a ridiculous habit of walking through Old Testament narrative,

making comments without really bringing a nice, clear outline. So I have two points, crushing idols and communing with God.

We'll start with the first one. I'll try to remember and let you know when we're transitioning. Right when we get to the beginning of chapter 32, it's a scene shift that you're familiar with this story.

If you go back to 3118, when God had finished speaking with Moses upon Mount Sinai, God gave Moses the two tablets of testimony, tablets of stone written by the finger of God. So there's a scene shift happening from being on top of the mountain and peering into this meeting between Moses and God. We zoom out, as it were, from that glorious meeting, and the focus changes from the top of the mountain where Moses is meeting with God to zooming in at the foot of the mountain, drawing attention there at least, to where the Israelites have been camping, waiting for their fearless leader to return.

And they are marked by impatience and doubts and complaints and action. They decide to take things into their own hands. Now, unfortunately, we're often guilty of this kind of thing as well.

Not waiting on God to act, not trusting on His Word to be our sufficiency and our guide. Unfortunately, for us, it may not look a lot different than what it did for the Israelites in the days of Moses. I mean, who among us doesn't struggle with being impatient? Who among us doesn't struggle with doubting, murmuring, complaining, or taking things into their own hands? Who doesn't attend church week after week and think in their mind or even make comments requesting just a few changes to the worship service or doing things the way that we used to do it or add a little bit of the way that we did it at the old place? We are guilty of taking things into our own hands at times.

We're wanting to speed up the pace of the agenda. It often results in manipulating people or situations for the purpose of self-promotion. That's where Aaron finds himself.

Do you not, in reading this passage or in hearing it just now, do you not see what Aaron is doing, how he responds to the people and think, Aaron, no, no, stop, what are you thinking? I mean, this is the same Aaron that in several chapters prior, chapter 24, verse 10, this Aaron sees God. He's heard a word from the living God. And now there isn't even a hint of reservation to this level of disobedience.

Make us a God, they say. And all we see from Aaron is this. Okay, here's how we start.

And then, this is your God. Tomorrow, we're going to sacrifice to it. What is he thinking? The people sat down to eat and drink.

That's exactly what was happening back in chapter 24 when Moses and Aaron saw God. They saw God and they ate and drank. Chapter 24, verses 10 and 11.

We would be amiss not to bring to bear the first two commandments into this equation as we consider this foolish tragedy. God had already told them clearly, you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol.

God didn't mince words. It was crystal clear, these first two words of the 10 that He had provided for His people. Make us a God, they said.

The first commandment was broken. They made it into a molten cap. The second commandment immediately broken.

This Moses, we don't know what has happened to him. This is not just the language of specificity with regard to this word, this Moses. It's a very disrespectful, dismissive language in the original.

Basically saying, who cares about your brother? Aaron, you're the man. You've been raised up for this. Make us a God or some gods.

In the original, it's not even clear that they wanted one God. They didn't care at this point. They just wanted to be busy about doing something.

Feeling good about themselves. Worshiping. They were all gathered about, verse 1 tells us.

Again, that's not just circling the wagons. They were gathered against the truth. Against God, ultimately.

Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord. Aaron boldly proclaims. After fashioning a calf at their request.

Tomorrow will be a feast. Aaron is attempting to worship the true God. Using a molten calf.

Here's the danger for us. Or the question for us to ask and consider this evening. Do we attach God's name to our own agendas? False agendas.

Aaron was using the right name. Going through the seemingly right motions. But worshiping the wrong God.

When we fall into this kind of sin, this is what it looks like. It looks like doing what is popular, rather than what is right. This is prevalent in our day.

If you can't beat them, join them. I'm tired of fighting the battles. We're just going to do it the way the people want.

This is happening all around us in so-called evangelicalism. When we fall into this kind of sin, it looks like forgetting what God has done and resorting to our former wicked ways. For the Israelites here in this passage, the remarkable grand rescue is in rear view.

It's not that long ago that they've experienced salvation and a glorious rescue that God accomplished for them. And now they find themselves worshiping a cow. Not even a real cow.

Metal that's been fashioned like a cow. I've got it written here in poetic form so you can take it away. The grand rescue is in the rear view.

And they're worshiping a cow that can't even move. Who would think it? But this is idolatry. This is us if we aren't careful.

So, another scene shift here. We start on the mountain with Moses and God. We've gone to the foot of the mountain.

Let's transition back. Zoom out. Focus back.

The conversation is happening on the top of the mountain. Verse 7, the Lord's speaking to Moses. Go down.

God had just handed Moses the tablets. The last verse of chapter 31. We see what's going on at the bottom.

Moses doesn't have that news yet. And God has to inform Moses of the situation at the bottom of the mountain. Corruption.

They've corrupted themselves. Turning aside. Manufacturing idols.

Worshiping those idols. Committing blasphemy. Proving that they are obstinate and rebellious in their hearts.

Verse 8 notes that this turning aside from the way that God had commanded was a quick turning. They have quickly turned aside from the way that I have commanded them. Listen, they were complaining about how long Moses was taking.

And now they quickly turn aside. There's no patience and impatience. Wanting God to act, which isn't bad, but wanting Him to do it on their terms, on their timetable.

And God comments to Moses, they're so quick to turn away from Me, Moses. And they're obstinate to top it off. Unwilling to listen.

Unwilling to hear. Unwilling to heed good counsel. God help us when we are obstinate in our attitudes.

Always offering excuses like, that's just the way I am. God just made me impatient. Or, offering excuses like, my situation is so different.

The obstinate person among us is often looking for advice and rarely following it. The Lord continues in verse 10. Now then, let me alone.

Moses, just go. This is not God being so disappointed with the Israelites that He just wants to go sulk on His own. As He continues there, leave me alone, Moses, that my anger may burn against them, that I may destroy them, and I'll make you a great nation.

God is not saying leave me alone so that I can go cry my heart out. He is saying, Moses, if you'll leave me alone, I'll take care of them. I'll wipe them out.

And Moses, I'll start all over with you. I'll build my kingdom with you, Moses. God was inviting Moses to intercede on behalf of the people, but not only offering the invitation, but there's a test given as well.

Moses, are you committed to my revealed will? My plans that I have promised from of old. Are you committed to my kingdom, Moses? Or, do you think it's about you? Are you more interested in your own? Moses, do you want to become the second Abraham? Would you like to start all over? All those obstinate, rebellious people that keep giving you problems, Moses? It's not going to get better. Do you want me to wipe them off? The face of the planet? Moses, do you want to be the chiefest patriarch? Here's your chance.

Just leave me alone, Moses. These are the options before Moses. On top of the mountain.

Make a name for yourself, Moses. Or pray for your people, Moses. And Moses chose God's greater glory over his own personal benefit.

He humbled himself. He entreated the Lord, as the way that it's recorded in v. 11. Then, Moses entreated the Lord his God.

And God, v. 14, changed his mind about the harm which he said he would do to his people. Unbelievable. The Lord changed his mind.

Now, we should understand that this is not some type of fickle situation on the part of God. He planned to rescue them all along. Moses was not in any way altering the plan of God.

He was simply carrying out the plan of God. God had determined to save His people and He had determined to do it through the prayers of the Mediator. Through the process of Moses dying to self, not wanting to start a new kingdom with Him being the chiefest patriarch, but to plead the promises of God and to believe what God had said that He would do for His people.

The Lord changed His mind. He relented, your translation may say. And it carries with it the notion of being moved to pity and compassion for others.

Let's look just briefly so that we can take away some beneficial application from this prayer of Moses on behalf of the people. First, let's notice what Moses did not do. He makes no attempt to minimize their idolatry.

Moses does not make any excuse at all for their sin. He made no effort at justifying their rebellion. He did not suggest that God's demands on His people were unfair.

He didn't argue in the slightest way the merits of the Israelites. Moses did none of this. But rather, the approach that Moses takes to the mercy seat is an appeal to God's affection as a father.

Oh Lord, why does Your anger burn against Your people? They're Your people. If you look back at verse 7, God had called them Moses' people. And Moses is flipping the script.

No, no, no, no. They're not my people. They're Your people, God.

You've made promises to them. He's reminding God of the affection that He has for His people. In the second half of verse 11, Moses offers a petition based on God's previous investment.

You have brought them out from the land of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand. God, You've exerted great effort in redeeming them. Act on it now.

Don't destroy them. Remember what You've done for them. And then a reminder of His reputation.

Moses reminds God of His reputation among the Egyptians. Verse 12, why should the Egyptians speak saying, with evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and destroy them from the face of the earth? God, if You destroy them, the Egyptians will say, He led them out just to slaughter them. He's not a good God.

Moses continues with a call to merciful compassion. Turn. He's pleading with God.

Turn from Your burning anger. Change Your mind, God, about doing harm to Your people. God, remember.

Remember that You're a compassionate, merciful God who takes pity on those who are needy. And then He pleads the promise of old. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel? You swore to them by Yourself.

You said to them, I will multiply Your descendants as the stars of heaven and all this land I will give. You shall inherit it. God, this is Your promise.

Remember what You said. Hear My prayer based on what You've promised for Your people is what Moses is doing here. The psalmist records this famous interchange in Psalm 106.

Pick up reading in verse 19. They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a molten image. Thus they exchanged their glory for the image of an ox that eats grass.

We've already covered the fact it actually couldn't eat grass because it was just metal. They forgot God their Savior who had done great things in Egypt, wonders in the land of Ham, and awesome things by the Red Sea. Therefore, He said He would destroy them.

Had not Moses, His Chosen One, stood in the breach before Him to turn away His wrath from destroying them? Moses responded to God in supplication and intercession. What a glorious privilege God has given us to stand in the breach, to turn away God's wrath from destroying sinners. Moses, at the end of this prayer, after God changes His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people, verse 15 tells us again, zoom out from the top of the mountain and back into the bottom, Moses is making his way down.

And he responds in anger. Righteous anger. His anger burned, verse 19, and He threw the tablets from His hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.

Righteous anger we might succinctly describe as being angry yet without sin. Being angry in the right way about the right things. Now, Moses wasn't always sinless in his rage.

He is here, but rarely was he. Rarely are any of us, unfortunately. In fact, with Moses, we could sufficiently argue that it's his frustration and anger that will be his final demise and keeps him from actually seeing the Promised Land and having his bones litter the wilderness with others.

But the picture here is clear. The Israelites had broken covenant with God. And the law of God was shattered.

Not just chipped on the corner. The tablets weren't cracked in a couple of spots. Moses shattered them at the foot of the mountain.

They were guilty of breaking the whole law as a result of breaking it at one, or in their case, a few points. James 2.10 makes this clear. The same is true for us.

When we're guilty of breaking one aspect of the law, we're guilty of breaking it all. And Moses proceeds. Verse 20, he liquefies the idol and forces them to consume it.

He burns it, grinds it, and scatters it, forcing them to consume it. What a great picture. Not as a literal solution, but it's a great picture because it wonderfully portrays the idea of absolute riddance.

Think about the picture with me here. From the altar to the latrine, you're following the processes. From being on stage to being in the sewer, getting rid of the idols completely for being on top.

This is what they're worshipping. To being in the toilet. That is the goal.

That's how we should deal with idolatry. So the question for us is, can you be found guilty of absolute riddance of your idols? Remember, this is the first point of the sermon. On crushing idols.

How sad is it that so many of us could not be found guilty of absolute riddance. The absence of Moses at the foot of the mountain gave the Israelites an opportunity to openly worship what they had been worshipping inwardly all along. Sin is so much better defined as who we are as opposed to what we do.

What we do when it's unrighteous and wicked is sin, but it flows from who we are. Our heart as the source is the real issue, and if we do not deal with idolatry and sin there, we are not adequately dealing with the problem of sin and idolatry in our lives. When we do things the way that we prefer, as opposed to God's clear commands, our worship will be contaminated.

Our gifts will all be corrupt. Our morals will end up compromised. There's no way around it.

Listen, there's probably not a single soul in here this evening whose actual danger is fashioning a golden calf. None of you have probably even given a thought to it, but attempting to refashion the God of the Bible to your specifications and your unique desires is just as idolatrous, and it is likely a real danger for every single one of us. Wanting Him to teach our minds but not transform our lives.

Wanting a spiritual lift on the Lord's day without submission to His commands during the week. Longing for Him to change others but not wanting Him to really bring about the radical change that we need. Wanting a God who is remarkably loving, but a little less demanding when it comes to holiness.

Wanting a God who is marked by infinite mercy, but not always as just as that mercy requires. That's idolatry. This story of the Israelites and the idolatry that they're guilty of is our story.

We are idolaters who flounder around in rebellion against our God. And this God who sees all and knows all saw us. If you're in Christ, He saw you wallowing in your miserable state, and He sent His Son so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.

There's a shadowy picture of that even here. Go down, Moses. In verse 7, Go down, Moses.

Help your people. It's a shadow of what would come when Jesus came down. Go down, Moses.

Your people whom I gave you, they've become corrupt. They're living in sin, Moses. They're turning from My law.

They're breaking My law. They're worshipping other gods, Moses. Go down.

If you don't go, Moses, I will destroy them. If Jesus hadn't come, we too would be swallowed up in God's wrath. Crushing idols.

It's unfortunate, but too often, we shove idols in the closet rather than taking them out with the trash. I mean, sure, the room looks cleaner. The life looks a little bit better from the outside.

But the reality is that the idol is still easily accessible because the necessary measures have not been made to obliterate it. Idols are not meant to be tolerated. They are meant to be annihilated.

From the stage to the sewer. From the altar to the latrine. If we do not obliterate them, only a small measure of temptation comes.

And it's as easy as walking over and opening up the closet. We're immediately right back into the idolatry. The gossip tells more rumors.

The drunk picks up the bottle. The lustful man goes back to pornography. The greedy cheats another person.

The unhappy lady binges again on shopping or food or whatever. The Israelites never had a chance to go back to this golden calf. It was annihilated, obliterated, crushed out of their lives.

Why not, friend? Why not stop dabbling with idols and destroy them instead? Why not? Moses breaks the tablets, shattering them at the foot of the mountain. Burns, grinds, scatters, and forces them to consume them. But there's still a problem.

The problem of Aaron. Continuing in verse 21. Now, the approach of Moses to Aaron is interesting.

Because he didn't say, as I suggested in the beginning, what we would say. No! Aaron, what are you thinking? Have you lost your mind? It's all your fault. Can I not trust you? Just for a little while.

While I go meet with the God who called us to this. Can I not trust you with anything? Moses, we expect, would have said what I would have said what many of us would likely say. But Moses doesn't do that at all.

Listen, Moses knew that Aaron was fully responsible as the leader. But he also knew and understood that the influence from the people must have been tremendous. So when Moses approaches Aaron, he does so with compassion and understanding, while at the same time not allowing any wiggle room for Aaron to shirk the blame or make excuses.

Really, we might say, it's an ideal confrontation when Moses comes to Aaron. However, though Moses' confrontation of his brother was ideal, it did not lead to an ideal response from Aaron. In fact, what we have from Aaron here is a nice example of how to not confess sin.

Aaron immediately turned on Moses. Back off, little brother. Relax.

Just relax a little. It's not that big of a deal. He's trying to make it a personal issue.

It's between Aaron and Moses now. Attempting to appease Moses rather than the God who was the primary one that he had an issue with regarding sin. After turning on Moses, then he attempts to blame others in the situation.

Moses, you know how prone to evil the people are. Have you been gone so long on the mountain, Moses, that you forgot how evil they were? How prone they were to this type of idolatry? By the way, Moses, you being gone so long, that actually led to part of this problem. Part of it's your fault, Moses.

They made me do it. Excuses, excuses, excuses. Now, there's some truth mingled in, woven in here from Aaron.

There's some truth in the midst of his excuses. And his partial confession ends up being clouded with the excuses. He turns on Moses.

He blames others. And on top of that, he goes a bit further and actually denies the extent of his own involvement. In exact detail, he gives specifics regarding the people's sin.

In fact, when he does that here in verse 24. My Bible page turned, so I was really confused about why I had the wrong verse there. Okay, verse 24.

Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off. So they gave it to me. I threw it into the fire and out came this calf.

Pardon, back up to verse 23. This is Aaron describing to Moses the people's responsibility in this sin. What happened? For they said to me, Make a God for us who will go before us.

For this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. Verbatim, from verse 1 of chapter 32. Exactly, Aaron is very willing to say all that they've done wrong.

But then, he's not so specific about his own involvement. As a reminder, look back at verses 2-4. Aaron said, Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.

All the people tore them off which were in their ears. They brought them to Aaron. Aaron took this from their hand.

He fashioned it with a graving tool. He made it into a molten calf. And then they responded.

But look what he says in verse 24. I said, whoever has any gold, let them tear it off. I threw it into the fire and out came this calf.

He outright lies about his involvement. A mold was designed. He fashioned this calf.

There was a graving tool. Details were added to make it actually look like a calf. There was intent on his part.

Now, he was guilty even if he was only involved minimally. But he was deeply entrenched in this sin. And he's avoiding all the incriminating details.

Abbreviating his role in the incident. This is everything that they did. I just kind of gathered the gold, I threw it in, and out came the calf.

What's the big deal? They're the problem, Moses. It's pathetic really. Moses, who had trouble speaking in the beginning, was provided a mouthpiece in Aaron, who now finds himself short of the words required for a full explanation and confession of sins.

Aaron, intentionally deceptive. When God tells the story at the beginning of the chapter, Aaron plays the starring role. When Aaron retells the same story, he's barely a minor character.

He may not even show up in the credits. But if we look ahead to verse 35, Then the Lord smote the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made. Aaron was guilty.

And his guilt had consequences, ramifications on others, so much so that they were completely out of control. Verse 25, Moses turns, he's dealing with Aaron, he turns and he sees the people and they're out of control. How'd that happen? Well, Aaron let them get out of control to be a derision among their

enemies.

This out of control, this is loose living on the part of people who claim to belong to God to the point that their enemies were ridiculing them. It's helpful for us to recognize the danger of doing this. Basically, they were allowing the enemies to say what you say about Jehovah and how you act doesn't match.

Therefore, your Jehovah must be a joke. There's an obvious disconnect because things don't line up. Which again is an opportunity for us to back up from the text and ask the question, how are you doing? Do you profess salvation by the God of the Bible? Do you claim to belong to Him? If so, does your life match your profession? Do the choices that you make day in and day out, do they back up your claim that you belong to the King? Is there enough evidence in your life to convict you of belonging to Christ? Or would you be found wanting? There's a clear distinction here between the Lord's people and those who are not the Lord's people.

Moses makes it clear, whoever is for the Lord, come to me. Whoever is against the Lord, put to death. There's no middle ground.

Even Jesus Himself in Matthew 12, He who is not with me is against me. There's no neutrality in our world. How many folks watch your life and secretly deride or dismiss Christ and Christianity based on what they see? Are there clear commands of Christ that you habitually ignore in your life? Are there obvious expectations for Christians in the Scriptures that you justify avoiding application of? Listen, this can be a grave danger for us.

Mixing in with the religious crowd at the right times. Rubbing shoulders with the saved, we might say. Using sanctified vocabulary without sanctified lives.

Working hard to be theologically precise without any application. Saying, yes Lord, yes Lord, yes Lord with our lips. And absolutely not with our lives.

It's a danger for us. It's a significant danger. Every man of you, put a sword up on his thigh and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp and kill every man his brother.

It's that significant. God says, kill everyone who is not for me. And they did as instructed and 3,000 died.

Seriously? Is it that big of a deal? Did Moses really hear from God on this? Is this a normal occurrence? Consider Asa. 2 Chronicles 15, verse 13. Whoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel should be put to death.

And they did so. So the Lord, verse 15, gave them rest on every side. Moses did in fact hear from God on this.

And unfortunately, this calf fashioning fiasco was not the only instance in which a stark contrast was made between those who sought the Lord and those who refused to seek Him. Rest was granted to God's people in the days of King Asa due to the serious measures taken regarding holiness. Rest was given as a result of dealing with obvious sin.

If you want to rest in Jesus, deal rightly with sin. Take it to the cross. And leave it there.

Back to our story here in Exodus. And coming back to it, remembering that these things happened to them as an example, the Apostle tells us. They were written for our instruction, Paul goes on to say, writing to

the church at Corinth.

Verse 30, Moses is aware of the guilt that accompanies the terrible idolatry that the Israelites have practiced, and he knows the need for making amends. His efforts are recorded for us here. This is not the first time that Moses has interceded for his people.

It happened in verse 14 at the Red Sea shores. It happened in chapter 15 at the bitter waters of Merah. In 17 at Riphidim when there was no water.

And again in 17 while they were battling the Amalekites all day long. What we know thus far from Moses is that when Moses prayed, God heard. When Moses prayed, God answered.

They crossed the sea dry shod. The bitter water was made sweet. An oasis flowed from a dry rock.

And they were delivered from their enemies when they fought the Amalekites. The Lord said to Moses, verse 33, I will blot sinners out of My book. There is a distinction delineated.

There's continuation commanded. Go, Moses. Verse 34, Go, lead the people where I told you.

But there's also punishment promised. In the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin. So, a brief overview up through the end of chapter 32.

God said you shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make any idols. God's people said, make us a god.

Aaron said, this is your god. Moses responded by shattering the covenant that God had made with His people, followed by burning, grinding, liquefying the idol, and forcing them to drink it, getting rid of it. God said, kill every man, brother, friend, and neighbor who is not with Me.

I will blot him out of My book. I will punish him for their sins. Quite a statement here regarding the seriousness of God's command to not worship any other god nor call any idol by His own name.

You would think, with this kind of memorable action, that no person or group of people would ever give a second thought to fashioning golden calves ever again. Enter Jeroboam, who made not one, but two. And I don't want to go deep into that story, but imagine the lunacy of idolatry.

Of not making one, but two, and making it easy so they don't have to go back where God had commanded them to worship. Just put it close to their house so they don't have to go through any trouble. All that to say, lesson learned from this story here? Definitely not.

Not among God's people. Not yet. We see the terrible consequences of not obeying God.

Now what I want to bring to light here in point number two, which you must be encouraged an hour in that I'm on point number two. The second half will be shorter. Which would make it not a half, but you understand the point.

Point two, that is. It is after kill every man, brother, friend, and neighbor who's not for me, that God says, I will punish them for their sin. God has dealt with the unbelievers.

He's talking about His people now. I will punish them for their sin. Chapter 33, moving on from the great disaster.

God has commanded Moses to carry on with the journey. When Moses was with God on the mountain, God said, go down. Now they're in the valley and God says to Moses, go up.

Look at chapter 33. Depart. Go up from here.

You and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt to the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to your descendants I will give it. Go up. You and the people.

Those people. You see God separating, even from His own people. You brought them up, Moses.

Not my people. Go back to verse 7, 32. God says they're His people.

Now, Moses, you brought them up. Again, verse 7 of chapter 32. God says, I brought them up.

And then verse 2. I will send an angel before you. Look with me at verse 34 of chapter 32. Go, lead the people.

Where I told you, behold, my angel shall go before you. Verse 2 of chapter 33. I will send an angel.

You go up with them, Moses. Verse 3. I will not go up in your midst. I'm not going.

The previously promised punishment in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sins, is here pronounced. Particularly in this way. I will send an angel.

I will not go with you. I mentioned we're in point number 2. I'll remind you of the title of that point. Communing with God, or cultivating communion with Christ.

I will not go with you. Verse 4. When the people heard this sad word, literally evil. When the people heard this evil thing that God was not going to go with them, the response was threefold.

A realization. Repentance. And resolve.

A realization. Repentance. And resolve.

When they heard this evil thing that the Lord was saying, they went into mourning. They divested themselves of any ornamentation. Realization.

The first response. They realized the severity of their plight. They were conscious of the seriousness of their situation.

They're aware now that God is serious. Aware of the implications of the foolish folly that they're guilty of. Comparatively speaking, they had it better than before.

Wilderness life was better than slavery. Aimless wandering beats brick making. But they weren't made for wandering in the wilderness any more than they were made to fashion bricks.

Which is a helpful reminder for us that we must avoid being guilty of any kind of comparison that is different than New Testament Christianity. Let's consider their situation in light of our context. They had been led out of the wilderness.

Their enemies had been defeated. They had been provided an angel as their guide and entrance into the promised land was guaranteed. Is this enough for you? Are you looking and longing for anything more

than mere deliverance from your earthly problems and security from eternal wrath? Listen, they were not concerned about the likelihood of being consumed.

I'm not going with you. I might destroy you along the way. They're sad that He's not going.

It's worth the risk to be near Him. They long to commune with Him and for Him to be with them, not just to send them on their merry way, even guaranteeing that the enemies will be defeated and they will finish the race in the end. They're distraught over the notion that God was not joining them on their continued journey.

They wanted to commune with Him. They were apparently not just looking for prosperity. They didn't just want to live in the land that flowed with milk and honey.

And this judgment that God placed on His people of old is hanging over us, looming heavy over us in our day, and we have unfortunately grown so used to it that we assume that it's normal. This assumption substantiates a lack of realization of the magnitude of our impending misery. We are in grave danger of going forward without the manifest presence of God.

Without a genuine realization of our actual predicament, the issues that face us, we will not respond in repentance from dead works and faith towards Jesus Christ. Here, the ancient people of God did realize the awful predicament, which is why we see them responding in repentance. What about us? What produces more fear in us? The sword? If you're not for me.

Or the lack of His presence. Do you want an escape from His wrath, but remain careless about His nearness? Too many in our day have come when a call was issued, but the coming wasn't a coming to God. It's proven to be an attempt merely to escape the sword of His wrath.

What if you could escape it? What if you could escape hell? Escape to a place that lacked His presence? No commands. No expectations. What if you could live as you want? What if grace prevailed so that you could abound in your sin? Would your response be, they went into mourning at this sad word that God would not be with them? The distinction is clearly delineated.

Separation is the outcome at the foot of the mountain. Separation was the result of Asa's remarkable reforms. And separation is the expectation of our salvation.

Be saved, Peter said, from this perverse generation. And the separation that we're called to as Christians is not a mere acknowledgement of grace. The separation that is expected for you and for me is an application of that grace.

Living in light of what Christ has done for us. The expected separation is clearly revealed by Jesus in His crystal clarity in His discussion of the final appearing. Listen from Matthew 25.

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, Jesus says, and all the angels with Him, then He'll sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him. And He'll separate them one from another as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

And He'll put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right, Come, you who are blessed of My Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you invited Me in.

Naked, and you clothed Me. I was sick, and you visited Me. I was in prison, and you came to Me.

Then, He'll say to those on His left, Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink.

I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in. Naked, and you did not clothe Me. Sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.

The final separation, in the end, is distinct. It's by Christ Himself. And it's not, do you believe in Me? It's not, did you accept Me? It's not even, do you understand that salvation is all of Me and not of you? But it is, was your life affected by the change that you claim? Does your life match this profession that you've made? Did your choices, do your choices, friend, back up your claim that Christ is your King? Or, is grace your default excuse for disobedience? Grace is the greatest incentive we have to follow Him more closely.

Where we are, as Christians, in our journey, is where they were in theirs. If you're a Christian, you've been rescued. They've been rescued across the Red Sea.

They've been instructed clearly at Mount Sinai. We have the Scriptures. Their wrong approaches have been pointed out here in the calf-fashioning fiasco.

The question remains for us, will we heed the exhortation? Will we respond rightly? They realized. And the right realization led to repentance. Repentance.

Turning from the natural, sinful way that we are into the direction towards God. Not merely thinking differently about your sin, but experiencing a complete directional shift in your life. Lack of repentance in our lives results in an insurmountable obstacle for God's mercy to freely flow.

That's quite a statement, so I'm going to make it again. Lack of repentance in our lives results in an insurmountable obstacle for God's mercy to freely flow. Here's why I can say that.

Because it would be inconsistent with His divine perfections to overlook a hindrance like lack of repentance. It would be unloving to people because it would overlook our ultimate happiness. Repentance opens up, we might say, the floodgates of God's mercy.

Humility in our lives props open the windows of Heaven allowing mercy to pour forth. The prophet Isaiah said it this way, your iniquities have made a separation between you and God. Your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.

Friend, unclog the dam by repenting of dead works and responding in faith to Jesus Christ. The method of bringing about repentance in the people of God here in this story is worth noting. It's significant.

Moses didn't point out all these things that were cluttering their lives, all these ornaments that they're divesting themselves of. He didn't have to. He simply pointed to the truths about God.

What God says about sin. What God says about holiness. What God says about unrepentant sinners.

And how that would affect the people of God. If you as the people of God are happy to harbor sin, God will not be near you. That's God's word to His people.

That's what Moses is relaying in the message here. I will punish them. Here's how I'll punish them.

I'm not going with them. They heard that as evil from the mouth of God. As we continue, the final little section there that we read earlier.

Verses 7-11 God could not come into the camp because the people were sinners. They were filthy, self-seeking sinners and He would not, could not draw near. So Moses, as a result, was forced to pitch the tent outside the camp in order for God to draw near.

It required extra effort for Moses to be able to seek the Lord and he was willing to do all that was required so that God would be pleased to draw near. He was resolved. They realized the predicament.

They responded in repentance and resolved to do whatever it took to seek the face of God, to commune with Him. Realization with no response is false realization. Repentance with minimal resolve to make things right and keep things right isn't thorough repentance.

Resolve to seek the Lord is revealed. Our resolve to seek Him is revealed in our use of the means of grace that God has given us for the purpose of seeking and knowing Him. The private and public means of grace that have been graciously and wonderfully provided for us as His people.

In closing, finally, their story was one of realization that led to repentance that resulted in resolve to seek the Lord wholeheartedly. What will our story be? Do you consider the lack of His nearness to be discipline? He calls it punishment here. Do you consider the lack of communion, close communion with Christ, punishment? To the degree that you're willing to remove all the barriers so that He's welcome to come and to draw near.

Is heaven in the end without His nearness along the way a sad, evil word to you? May God help us to make it so. To realize the actual situation that we find ourselves in. To repent of being satisfied with so little.

And to resolve to do whatever it takes that He might be pleased to draw near. May God help us to be a people who readily and regularly crush every idol and continually cultivate communion with Christ our King. Let's pray.

Gracious God and Heavenly Father, how we thank You for Your Word. For the sufficiency that we find in it. For the promise of Your Spirit to apply it.

God, we admit that we must have You to take the truth as it is in Jesus and to cause it to settle deep in our souls, to affect every fiber of our being, to shine the light of the glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ into every dark crevice of our soul. That we, as Your people, might be consecrated to You. Separated from everything that is not You.

In order that You might receive honor and glory both now and forever. In order that we might enjoy You from now on and forever. God, help us to live.

To live in light of these truths. To recognize the reality of the situation. To repent continually of sin.

And to resolve to seek Your face. To seek it forevermore. In Christ's name, Amen.

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