

Sermon Manuscript: Exodus 32:1-14

Intro – reminder that sermon notes can be found on the app!!

Recap to this point in Exodus.

This morning we are continuing to look at how God shapes His people, how He uses both the ordinary and the extraordinary to draw men and women deeper into relationship with Him. It's not all easy though; today we are going to see how He uses failure to shape His people. This idea of failure is a recurring one throughout Scripture, one that is often used to encourage the believer that even in our faithlessness we have a faithful God who both forgives sin and uses it to cultivate faithfulness in His children. Rahab, David, Peter, and Paul are all examples of this throughout Scripture. This is also not a concept we are unfamiliar with. I remember being young and trying to get pecans to fall out of my grandparent's tree one time I was staying with them. To do this I simply did what I saw my grandfather do; I chunked a block of wood up into the tree hoping to hit the pecans and then just collect them after they fell. I failed to take two things into consideration though: the block of wood and gravity. Unlike my grandfather who knew to toss the wood away from where he was standing, I tossed it straight up into the tree, only to watch it come straight back down and nail me right above the eye with its point. In this situation I failed on multiple levels. Take this same example and fast forward 25 years or so to where I am today, if I were to do the same thing and fail in the same way you would all look at me and say, "how dumb can you be?" But in my mind at that time, it made perfect sense. And that's kinda where we find the Israelites this morning; making the worst possible decision, one that from the outside looking in doesn't even seem possible but for them in the moment one that was perfectly justified. In no way do I say that to justify the decision, rather I say it to challenge us as we are so quick to point the finger of blame towards someone else, while we in fact make similarly horrendous decisions all the time. ***Just like the Israelites, we regularly fail and are in constant need of God's mercy, grace, forgiveness, and love to shape us into men and women who follow him no matter the pressure around us and who pursue His glory no matter the temptation to pursue our own.***

If you remember last summer when we looked at Exodus 16, the account of God's people grumbling and complaining against Moses, against God and His apparent lack of provision, you remember that the time between the exodus and their grumbling was not long at all; it was about one month. When you think about it in that context, the fact that they so quickly forgot God's extraordinary provision for both their release from slavery and the tangible needs of their journey it seems absurd that they so quickly forgot. And then here we go today, Exodus 32. Israel goes next level in their rejection of God as they do more than just complain about His provision, they very boldly construct a golden image, of which they say "*these are the gods who brought you out of the land of Egypt!*" Any guess as to how long it has now been since their escape from Egypt? Just over... 2 months. I don't know about you but even more sobering to me than the fact that they created an idol is the fact that they ***so quickly*** abandoned the God who rescued them from 400 years of bondage. You and I may not be tempted to fashion an idol out of gold, or form our

god out of physical matter, but we will regularly be tempted by much lesser things to abandon the One who rescued us out of sin, death, hell, and eternal separation from Him.

****Prayer****

Body

This week and next are two parts of the same sermon, both of which cover the whole of Exodus 32. Over the two weeks we will be looking at four different heart conditions seen in the passage, and we will see how God works even through our failure.

So with that in mind let's jump into the passage... we will start with verses 1-6.

The Gold Calf

*32 When the people saw how long it was taking Moses to come back down the mountain, they gathered around Aaron. "Come on," they said, "make us some gods who can lead us. We don't know what happened to **this fellow Moses**, who brought us here from the land of Egypt." 2 So Aaron said, "Take the gold rings from the ears of your wives and sons and daughters, and bring them to me." 3 All the people took the gold rings from their ears and brought them to Aaron. 4 Then Aaron took the gold, melted it down, and molded it into the shape of a calf. When the people saw it, they exclaimed, "O Israel, **these are the gods who brought you out of the land of Egypt!**" 5 Aaron saw how excited the people were, so he built an altar in front of the calf. Then he announced, "Tomorrow will be a festival to the Lord!" 6 The people got up early the next morning to sacrifice burnt offerings and peace offerings. After this, **they celebrated with feasting and drinking, and they indulged in pagan revelry.***

The first condition we see, and the first blank on your worship guide is that of an **idolatrous heart**. It comes as no surprise that in looking at a passage where God's people willfully crafted a graven image that the element of failure to unpack is that of idolatry. Which means that to start we must have a working definition of what idolatry actually means. Tony Merida in his commentary on Exodus puts it simply: **idolatry is putting something or someone in the place of God**. Another way to describe it as seen throughout Scripture is unfaithfulness. This is often used in connection with the image of marital unfaithfulness. In fact, we have a minor prophet where this picture is used in great detail to describe the people of God, the book of Hosea. When we pursue something or someone other than God, we are committing an act of unfaithfulness, much like a man or woman does when he or she is unfaithful with their spouse. Here in Exodus 32, what are the people putting in the place of God? On a tangible or physical level, they are taking the gold given to them by the Egyptians as a picture of God's grace toward them and using it for unholy purposes, to create an image of their God. On an internal or heart level, they are elevating their own **comfort, understanding, and will** above that of God. **Comfort**, in that they are doing what is familiar to them. Remember, it's only been two months since leaving Egypt. Their entire lives have been lived in a culture that placed a very high value on the worship of created things. **Understanding**, in that they didn't know what was going on. Or that's the excuse anyway. They knew Moses has left them to go up the mountain and meet with God, but they didn't understand why it was taking so long. They also couldn't check in with Moses to see how much longer he would be, so to try and create a situation which they understood, they created a visible deity that they could

“follow”. **Will**, in that they knew God’s will and didn’t like it. Moses had given them the ten commandments, he had led them in a worship service where God was tangibly present, and he had told them where he was going and what he was doing. God’s will for His people was becoming more and more clear every single day, but the people just didn’t like it. They had a better idea for how things should be done and since Moses wasn’t around to say otherwise, they just did what they wanted. They feasted and drank to their new image, and they engaged in pagan revelry, which likely included many depraved sexual behaviors. Ultimately each of these things revealed a deep-seated distrust in God and in His plan for them. They were saying “God I know what You did, and I know what You said, but I have a better idea about what my new freedom should look like.” **Their idolatrous heart translated into a life which exalted self-gratification over the plans and purposes of God.**

Merida goes on to describe some common idols of the heart that we face today. Money, sex, a romantic relationship, peer approval, competence and skill, secure and comfortable circumstances, beauty, brains, success, ambition are all on the list.¹ Are these things bad? No, they are gifts from the Lord. But **when the pursuit of them compromises our faithfulness to His word and His will then we are engaging in idolatry**, much like the Israelites did.

With any passage like this there is one very real danger; that we read it from a position of arrogance. We look at the Israelites, recognize how quickly they abandoned God and say, “Oh I would never do that.” Or, if we are feeling a little more humble, we may say, “I would never do that so quickly.” Paul speaks of this danger in 1 Corinthians 10:6-8, 11-14.

*Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.*⁷ *Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.”*⁸ *We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.*⁹ *We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents,*¹⁰ *nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer...*¹¹ *Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.*¹² **Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.**¹³ *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*¹⁴ *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.*

The first condition of the heart we see in this chapter is that of an idolatrous heart. We continue in our text with verses 7-14.

And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’” And the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.” But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent

¹ I might add the need to be right to this list.

*from this disaster against your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.'" And the LORD **relented** from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.*

This is a hard passage. In it we see the just response of the Lord to the wicked actions of His people. He says that He will consume the people. Not just punish them, consume them. Other translations say destroy them. **Destroy: a verb meaning to cause the destruction or undoing of.** This is no light sentence. It is also hard because in it we see a phrase used that makes us uncomfortable, the phrase being *"so the Lord **relented**..."* Other translations say the Lord repented of or changed His mind. Now for us, this is something we are well familiar with. It seems like every time I go to Taco Bell and look up at the menu I change my mind countless times while waiting to order. One minute I want a hard taco, the next I want a taco salad, the next I may want a plate of nachos. Ultimately, I change my mind because I don't really know what I want. I don't know what is good. I don't know if my choice is the right one. I don't know if I will regret choosing one thing over another. I am unsure and this leads to the back and forth of my choice. This however is not what is being referenced when talking about God. God does not change His mind because He is unsure of the best course of action. He does not repent because He mistakenly made the wrong choice. What our text says is that He **relented**. **This word means to cease a particular activity, often with the implication that the relenting is a gracious act.** God did not decide there was a **better** course of action, He graciously ceased due to it being **the best** course of action; the one which would bring Him glory and would stay true to His character. The people deserved destruction. They had forsaken God. They had elevated lesser things above God, the supreme creator and sustainer of life, the one who had rescued them out of many tragic generations of slavery and suffering. They deserved nothing less than what God had told Moses He would do. And before we think our sin is any less deserving of extreme punishment, it is not. James says that the one who guilty of even one sinful act is guilty of them all. We, like the Israelites deserve to be consumed, yet we, like the Israelites have received the gracious gift of God as He relents from giving us what we truly deserve. Romans 3:23 is a well-known verse that very succinctly captures this reality. It says *the wages of sin is death...* because of the Israelites sin they deserved death... *but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord...* God's relenting from a justly deserved punishment is nothing less than a gracious gift. Does this mean the Israelites got off without any consequence for their actions? Or that we will escape all consequences when we sin? Not at all. As we will see next week, they do receive significant repercussions for their idolatry, but they are far less than what was deserved.

Moses though plays a key role in this whole episode. He intercedes on behalf of the people and in so doing he lives out the original call God had placed on his life. Remember back in Exodus 3 when God came to Moses in the burning bush. What did He ask of Moses? That he would go and stand before Pharaoh on behalf of the people, that he would intercede for them. Of course, we know that Moses did not respond well to this call... he asked that God send someone else for a number of reasons. God had to work on Moses before he could do what God asked of him. And apparently Moses got the message because now instead of standing before a man asking for the peoples release from slavery, he is standing before God asking for their release from destruction. Moses now has an **intercessors heart**. Again, much like earlier in talking about our human

perception of biblical words, we need to be careful with how we think about intercession. For many of us when we think of intercession, we simply think of coming alongside someone in their suffering, we think of asking for the salvation of friends or family members, we think of prayers that in our mind will change some situation. **And while this is without a doubt accurate, it is not complete. At the heart of intercession is not a change of circumstance, it is the glory of God.** It is that God's character, nature, and attributes are lifted up and held in the highest esteem². Look again at our text, what is the reason Moses gives for his request? It is two part. One, that the Egyptians would not see of this destruction and perceive evil of God, saying that it was with evil intent that He led them out of Egypt. Two, that the promises of God would not be broken. That His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be remembered and honored. Should the destruction come upon God's people as He had said and only Moses be left to continue, then the promise to Abraham would have been broken and God would not have been faithful to His covenant. Moses knew this, he knew that if God were to destroy His people then His name and glory would not be honored, would not be lifted up, but would be broken and torn down. More than a change of situation Moses wanted the glory of God to be held in highest regard, both among the Israelites and the surrounding nations. Psalm 106 makes this connection... it says that *"they [Israelites] made a calf in Horeb and worshipped a metal image. They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass."* While the people **exchanged** God's glory for a lesser thing, Moses **pursued** God's glory as he interceded for the people. An intercessors heart is at its core seeking the glory of God.³

This was in fact Jesus' heart in intercession, as He stood between a holy God and a broken people. In John 17, one of Jesus' most well-known prayers He is interceding on behalf of the people, asking the Father that they would be kept and not lost, that they would have joy, that they would be sanctified in truth. More than these requests though is a deep desire for God to be glorified, both in His own life and obedience and in the life and obedience of His people.

Closing – have praise team come up

The praise team is going to come on up and we are going to respond to God's word this morning. For us, the story of the golden calf provides a sobering reminder that the danger to elevate lesser things above God is always lurking, that we are in constant need of God's grace. Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 10 further instructs us, as we are to take heed lest we fall in this same way. Andy is going to play quietly for a few minutes, and during this time I want us to reflect on this account, to ask the Lord what things in our lives we may have elevated above Him, to ask Him for the grace to flee from idolatry and to pursue His glory above all else.

² Definition of glory/glorify in Jn. 17:1

³ How might the world respond differently to the people of God if our aim was the glory of God and not the winning of some argument on social media?

Closing Song: Lord, I Need You

Call to Worship: Psalm 106:1-2

Worship Set: (1) God So Loved (2) 10,000 Reasons (3) How Great the Father's Love

Communion: Philippians 2:5-11

Benediction: Romans 8:31-34

Timeline

The Exodus

Exodus 19:1 "On the 3rd new moon after the exodus..." This is between 60-90 days.

19:8 "all the people answered... all that the LORD has spoken we will do."

Worship weekend – 19:9-25 This is 3 days

Moses and Aaron go up on Mt. Sinai

Moses and Aaron come down to speak to the people. Unsure how long this took. Maybe a couple days.

Moses tells the people all the words of the Lord and ALL THE RULES. Ex. 24:3. The people respond... "all the words of the Lord we will do."

24:12 "the LORD said to Moses, "come up to me on the mountain..." 24:16 "The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mt. Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud." 24:18 "and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights." This is 40-47 days

Worship Guide Outline
God Shapes Us Through Failure
Exodus 32

Part 1

An Idolatrous Heart (1-6)

An Intercessors Heart (7-14)

Part 2

A Committed Heart (15-29)

A Sacrificial Heart (30-35)

Friday Email Paragraph

As we continue this week in Exodus, we come to the account of Israel's idolatry and the golden calf. If we were to create a Mount Rushmore of Israel's failure throughout her history, this would easily make the cut. And while we may never be tempted to construct an idol of gold, we are often tempted to elevate lesser things above God. This passage reminds us of the danger of idolatry and it shows us the gracious work of God even in our failure.