

FEBRUARY 11

Exodus 32-33

Why does the golden calf have to be on my birthday? That day was not a great day for this young nation. Yet, as we will see so often, after a crisis, something good will come. That good thing comes because some follower of God is moved by what happens and lays their heart out before God. We will see this over and over. This becomes a noticeable pattern, only because God is gracious and because some believer is there who loves God. Where this "believer" is absent, the crisis only escalates. Where this person is present, we see God's glory.

Exodus 32

Vs. 1-6 The people demanded an idol. Even though idolatry can be seen in Jacob's family in Canaan, in Egypt Israel had become trained in worshiping idols and imagining that divinity was in that statue. Inherent in idolatry is having a god we can control. It is of our making and we feel comfortable with its limitations and demands. This is not only satanic deception and human manipulation, but more than all, it is the power of sin.

The power of sin defies all intellect and reason, all compassion and desire. Reading this story you have to remember there was still fire at the top of the mountain. There was still a pillar of cloud and fire, and there was still manna every morning. Two to three million people were encamped around Mt. Sinai and the nation of Egypt was in ruins. The people had witnessed the greatest miracles of all time; they had heard the voice of God and they were given the Ten Commandments. So, why did they do this? How could Aaron have let them do it? What does Satan use best, atheism or confused spirituality? Clearly - confused spirituality. What does sin use best? Everything.

As disciples, we need to take care. That same depraved nature is in us. The difference is that we have been given hearts cleansed in Christ and infused with a new life in the Spirit. Our strength is our total dependence on the Spirit and the Word and the grace of God. We are strongest following Christ in the harvest, focused on God's grace, our redemption and the need of this world. As Paul said, "When I am weak, then I am strong." We can never forget that we are spiritually bi-polar. We need our daily time (meds) with God in His Word.

Vs. 2-5 I wonder if Aaron was afraid. Not only did Aaron design and make the calf, but he organized the worship. Maybe he was trying to keep the people from a full scale riot.

V. 6 The last part of this verse is quoted in 1 Corinthians 10:7, *The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play*. The word "play" in this context would be sexual immorality. I don't know if sex and idolatry were always mixed everywhere, but they definitely were mixed in Canaan. It was the perfect way for man to degrade himself in every way. I think it makes the enemy happy.

Vs. 7-14 This is a very important interaction between God and Moses. God expressed His anger with the people, but this was for Moses and for all of Israel to understand Him. God knew what Moses would say and how this would be necessary for Israel.

V. 10 God had already shown the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah. What God says here was a "test" for Moses; but God knew he would not only pass, but step up to a higher level of seeking God.

Vs. 11-14 This is why Moses was such a great man. It was love for God and for His people. Notice that after the logical argument of v. 12, Moses reminds God of His covenant with Abraham, stating that that covenant was without condition. God swore by His own self. It means that the covenant with Abraham, in some hearts of faith, was fully understood as eternally binding on God.

There is a line of thinking called the "openness of God." The idea is that God can change His mind and plans based on new data or the unexpected actions of men. Passages like this one are often used by critics to show that God does change His mind, that His plans are not set and that He doesn't know the end from the beginning. God does know the end from the beginning and these verses do not disprove that. It is important to let Scripture interpret Scripture; that is, we need to take what the Bible says as a whole, and balance it against what we might read in one or two verses that seem to say something different. The message of the entire Bible is that God knows the end, and the tiny details thereof, from the beginning. For example:

Psalm 139:4 *Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.*

Psalm 139:16 *Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*

In light of God's foreknowledge and His unchangeableness, how do you interpret what God says to Moses in this portion? Most people see this as a test for Moses and a way to display the shepherd's heart that God had developed in Moses during those 40 years in the wilderness of Midian tending sheep.

Vs. 15-20 Now Moses is mad. When he was on the mountain talking to God, the issue was still theoretical for him. When Moses came down and saw the people, it aroused his own sense of justice and zeal for God.

Vs. 15-16 Moses is coming down the mountain with these amazing tablets on which God Himself had inscribed the Ten Commandments. The commandments were the summary of the covenant that God was making with the nation; that is, obey and be blessed.

V. 18 This is all so ironic. It was a sound like joy, but it was defeat. There was nothing wrong with singing and dancing. There was the idolatry, but also in v. 25 it says they *had broken loose*. There was something that happened here that was a moral and social breakdown.

V. 19 I don't fully understand why Moses broke the tablets. I would imagine that when Moses saw the extent of what had happened and how many of the commandments had been broken, he realized the people had already broken the covenant with God; and in his despair and anger, he broke the tablets.

V. 20 By Moses doing this he showed that he, a man, was showing the powerlessness of their "god."

Vs. 21-24 Everyone always notices how Aaron tries to pawn this off on the people and chance. *I threw it (gold) into the fire and out came this calf*. And to think that Aaron would become the high priest of these people. God will change Aaron through this event and it will show God's patience and grace.

Notice that Moses gives Aaron the responsibility. If Aaron had led, he might have stopped the people from bringing sin upon themselves. He should at least have tried to stand in the way.

Vs. 25-29 There was such disorder that whatever order had existed up until now had crumbled. This will actually be a big event in the history of Israel, because when Moses called, all of the Levites came to him. It doesn't mean that some people from other tribes didn't come, but no other tribe, lock, stock and barrel, completely gave themselves to the Lord like this. This then is the selection and ordination of the tribe of the Levites to be the servants and teachers of the people in the worship of God.

V. 25 Notice Moses' word about giving their enemies something to laugh at. I wonder if spiritual enemies were also in view. God is making a nation to be a witness to the nations. It has only been 40 days since they made a covenant with God. Satan is going, "Seriously, dude, this is too easy."

V. 27 The Levites help Moses dispense justice. Apparently whatever happened as a result of this idolatry was measurable. It appears that most of the people joined in the worship, but only these 3000 were found having committed adultery or murder or rape or whatever. This judgment probably reflects a violation of commandments 6-10.

Vs. 30-34 Now that Moses himself has seen what the people have done, he pleads again for them. This is why Moses was a great man and follower of God. This entire section will explain something in the next chapter about why the people worshiped God when Moses went to the tent of meeting.

V. 32 The book seems to be a concept they already had regarding who would be acceptable to God and live with Him. Now it *might* have been the book of the census they were going to be taking, or it could also be that in these months they had already been compiling a written record of the people and their ages. However, it seems that since God wrote the book, it is the Book of Life, meaning that the line of faith from Adam to Moses already understood that God was keeping a record and only those who were in the book would live with Him. Note that Moses is willing to stand in the gap and take the place of the people.

V. 33 God says that only those who sinned will be punished.

V. 34 This is God promising to continue to lead Israel. God is saying that Moses would lead the people to the place He promised, but that was still 10 or more months away.

V. 35 I would guess that the plague was aimed at those who had instigated the worship or were guilty of what the 3000 had done, that Moses and the Levites had missed. This will begin to show the people, that the sins of a few affect the entire congregation.

Exodus 33

Vs. 1-6 After this event, God tells Moses to go with the people; but that He, Himself, will not dwell in the middle of the people because if His holiness came in contact with their sin, they would go, "Boom!"

This statement by God launched another crisis, and the people mourned when they heard it. They were beginning to understand that their sin and disobedience was a major issue. God was not an idol or a religion. He was a Person to be dealt with in a relationship.

Vs. 7-11 All of this disaster brought this custom into being. God said He would not come among the people, and so Moses had to go outside the camp to meet with God and intercede for the people. The people worshipped, knowing that their sin was separating them from God and that Moses was going out there to ask for mercy for the people. Again, this is another "good" thing that came from the malfunction with the calf.

This tent was not the tabernacle. When the tabernacle is built, it will be exactly in the middle of the people with God's presence in the tabernacle. All of what is happening here is leading up to that.

V. 11 It is interesting that Joshua basically lived there, making sure, I suppose, that no one from the people tried to sneak in to get a peek.

This whole adventure led to a crisis and Moses and the people knew it. If God could not and would not dwell in their midst, they were cooked. For Moses especially, the load was unbearable, and he needed God's presence and assurance.

Vs. 12-23 Now we get an idea of those first conversations Moses had with God in that tent. This is a very important and interesting portion of Scripture, especially for us as disciples.

V. 13 What was Moses asking for, another miracle? The people had seen miracle upon miracle with no real change of heart. Moses didn't need to see another miracle. Moses wanted to know God. In my mind, this passage makes Moses great.

Vs. 14-17 Even when God promises that His presence will go with Moses and that He will give him rest, Moses doesn't stop.

V. 18 In his weakness Moses could have asked for anything, but in v. 18 he says, *Please show me your glory*. His deepest desire and need was that he wanted to know God personally. He didn't want to have to rely on the ups and downs of experience and events. He needed something more stable and unchanging than successes and his own feelings. He needed to see and know the heart of God. In God showing Moses His innermost heart, Moses knew he was welcomed in and accepted. What will happen will not make Moses perfect, but it will increase his faith. There is something in this that also happened to the prophet Elisha.

Vs. 19-23 Notice that whatever is promised here is different than when Moses and the others ate with the Lord. What Moses is about to see is different. Also, this is not simply sight. There is a very personal thing happening that will give Moses the ability to lead another 38 years. It isn't visual; it is spiritual. Moses asks to see God's glory, and God tells Moses three things will happen. How do those three things represent God's glory? More on this tomorrow when it actually happens.

For us as disciples, as we yearn to serve Christ in the harvest, what is it that we really want? It takes a long time to finally distill the pure desire out of us and our motives. We work and see successes and failures and realize that none of them last or change us in a way that lasts. What Moses asked for was the only thing that truly makes sense. We need to know the Lord, to see His heart and be welcomed into His heart. This was Paul's desire in Philippians 3. If our service depends on results, we are dead. If our mood and faithfulness depend on visual results, we fail. When we serve, knowing and seeing the Lord as our love and treasure, fully welcomed and beloved, we follow with joy and faithfulness regardless of what the voices of men say to us, or what the "results" look like.

Not that this portion has anything to do with me, but I'm glad I can latch onto this truth on my birthday. I don't want my relationship with God to be through bowing to the "calf" of results or what others think of me. If I get to blow out the candles, this will be my wish, *Show me Your glory*.

Matthew 26:69-27:14

Matthew 26:69-75

Nothing is more haunting than Luke's account of Peter's denial, where in the middle of Jesus' ordeal, there is a break in the action and Jesus hears the rooster and looks out to the courtyard. His eyes meet Peter's, knowing that Peter has just publicly "sworn to God" that he doesn't know Jesus. Poor Peter. Like every great leader, before he became useful, he had to hit the wall at 500 mph and become broken.

Matthew 27:1-14

Vs. 1-5 As they led Jesus away, Judas now understood that Jesus would be killed and that the people would blame him. Used by Satan to achieve Satan's ends to have the Jews incur the guilt of killing their Messiah, Judas had not achieved his end. What would 30 pieces of silver get you? It couldn't have been the money. Maybe he thought he could corner Jesus, and Jesus would finally have to show His power and destroy the Romans. Judas might have escaped the wrath of the people by committing suicide, but not God. The minute he croaked, he was standing before God. What was he thinking? But Judas wasn't the only one who made mistakes. Satan never understood the mystery of the incarnation or the mystery of that strange, funky nation that would be formed at the resurrection of Christ, bound by no common language, race or boundary, bound only by the cleansing, justifying, sanctifying blood of Christ and His indwelling Spirit. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:8, *None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*.

And to make Satan's defeat complete, by God's grace, Israel will rise and fulfill its destiny and burn brightly for its Messiah in earth's darkest hour. *And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.* (Daniel 12:3)

Vs. 6-8 You don't find anything more irrational or ironic than this. They paid Judas to betray Jesus to His death. That was OK. But to use this *blood money* for religious purposes was, according to their "law," sinful. So they bought a field for the burials of foreigners.

Vs. 9-10 This is referring to a prophecy in Zechariah 11:12-13 almost verbatim. So what does this have to do with Jeremiah? Jeremiah 19 refers to the plot of ground, *the potter's field*. This field would insure the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Zechariah describes the price of the betrayal. Here, the field and coming judgment are what's in view.

Vs. 11-14 Pilate really lived in the Roman capital of Judea in Caesarea, on the coast. He came to Jerusalem during the feasts because of the risk of riots and to enjoy the festivities.

You really have to put all of the gospels together to understand Jesus' interaction with Pilate. For his part, Pilate tried all sorts of chess moves on the Jews to release Jesus. He finally caved into personal fear when the Jews threatened to tell Caesar on him. Pilate gave in. He didn't have to. Rather than being trapped in playing chess, there is that one unexpected, invincible move where you simply throw the board into the air and say, "This is what I'm going to do regardless of the cost." And you obey God. It sure simplifies things.

Psalm 33:1-11

This is a great psalm of praise. Notice that there is no mention of distress or danger or crying out. That is all behind David as he wrote this.

V. 1 Notice that praise is native and natural to the upright. How do you know if a person is upright? They are praising God.

V. 3 So where does that *new song* come from? And when does it arrive on our lips? It isn't natural and it comes at a price. Read Psalm 40:1-10. If the Lord hasn't fully led a person through their pit and bog, He still has hasn't put the new song in their mouth.

Vs. 4-11 Notice the words used for the Word of the Lord. Notice too that the creation is evidence of God's eternal power and divine control. *For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.* (Romans 1:20)

Proverbs 8:33-36

V. 33 This is a command. It is something we are to actively seek and pursue in all situations. It is a part of prayer and our relationship with God.

V. 34 And here is the blessing for those who do it.

Vs. 35 & 36 are a very powerful contrast, and v. 36 is a truth that most people will not realize until it is way too late.