

Our Only Hope is a Mediator

Exodus

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Bible Text: Exodus 32:1-10, Exodus 32:19-28
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Would you join me by taking your copy of the Scriptures and turn with me to the book of Exodus 32? I'm going to read verses 1 through 10 and then I'm going to ask you to skip down to verse 19 and we'll read a little further. But Exodus 32, beginning at verse 1.

1 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." 2 So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." 3 So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. 4 And 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!" 5 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." 6 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. 7 And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. 8 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!'" 9 And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. 10 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."

Now skip down to verse 19 now

19 And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. 20 He took the calf that

they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it. 21 And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?" 22 And Aaron said, "Let not the anger of my lord burn hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. 23 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.' 24 So I said to them, 'Let any who have gold take it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf." 25 And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies), 26 then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, "Who is on the LORD's side? Come to me." And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. 27 And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.'" 28 And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell.

This is God's word.

Just before we pray you'll see a picture, icon of the Church of the Crossroads here in town, Pastor John Parkey. I'd like for us to pray for them today. Would you join me in doing that as we pray for ourselves as well?

Our Father, we need to be reminded from time to time that we are not the only church in this community, and actually we should be thankful for that. This is a large community, not everyone will attend here at Calvary, they may choose to attend elsewhere and so, Lord, we want to thank you for the Church of the Crossroads and thank you for the blessing that you have bestowed upon them, and pray for John as he ministers to the people this morning, pray that they will be helped and challenged and that they will continue to make you known by your grace in this community. And Father, for us as well, would you help us to do our part in this community and around this world and make you known? And also today as we open the Scriptures and you hear us, we hear your voice speak to us, Lord, it would be so easy for us to read these words and think, "Oh, my goodness, how old they are," how old the sense of it was and not be able to connect with it ourselves. And so Holy Spirit, help us, help us to see that there's things, there are warnings to us today, may we heed your warning, may we amend our ways that we might live for you and make you known in this community. For the sake of Christ we pray. Amen.

I want you to imagine with me this morning a young man and a young woman very much in love. They've dated for a good while. They've become engaged and they've set a wedding date. The wedding comes and that day it's very emotional, very beautiful, very sweet. They pledge their love to one another, their present love and their future love to one another and they make vows of deep commitment to one another. In other words,

"It's gonna be you and nobody else. I'm gonna love you exclusively, no one else." It was a great day, a beautiful day. Just a few weeks go by, five, six weeks. One of the spouses decides that they're gonna leave work early, come and surprise their spouse. They get home and they notice that there's a strange car in the driveway. They don't think anything of it. They're in love, that is, until one spouse puts the key in the door and they unlock the door and they come in and they find their spouse in the throes of sexual intimacy with another lover. I want to suggest to you this morning, that is exactly what is happening in Exodus 32.

Now here's the danger for us. We will read this, we will hear this, and we will think, "Certainly these passages don't have anything to do with me. I mean, this is 2019. This is hundreds of years ago. This is Old Testament. Surely this doesn't have anything to do with me." But before you conclude this, before you conclude that this could never happen to your relationship between you and your Lord, I remind you of these words found in 1 Corinthians 10, keep in mind that these were written, Paul was writing these words to warn the first century church of this particular event. He said, "Now these things," that's these things that we just read, "took place as examples for us," for the church, "that we might not desire evil as they did. 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.'" By the way, that word "play" there is filled with sexual innuendo. In other words, they weren't playing badminton, okay? Paul goes on to say, "Now these things happened to them as an example but they were written down for our instruction on whom the end of the ages come." So Exodus 32 is a warning to believers today. In other words, this really does have everything to do with us in 2019.

Now most of you know we've been working our way through the book of Exodus. We have today and two more Sundays and we'll be finished. Last time we looked at this we were in chapter 25 and you'll remember in chapter 25 God was introducing a tabernacle project. He told his people, "I want you to build a tabernacle so that I can dwell with you." In other words, God exposed his heart that day and said, "Look, what I really want, I really want to dwell with you. I want to be your God and you be my people." Then in the meantime, Exodus 32 happened.

So a little background summary maybe, you know, just to remind us. God has been extremely loving to this people. I mean, he heard their cry as they were in bondage in Egypt and he heard their cry and he rescued them by his grace. He pulled out all the stops, "Gonna rescue you. Gonna bring you to me." And he did. He brought them out of bondage through the Red Sea, brought them through the wilderness and brought them to the foot of Mount Sinai. It was there that he gave them commandments. You know, remember we talked about these, these were loving commandments. These were fences put up around their lives for their good, to build a relationship, to know how they should live in the family of God. Moses had gone up into the mountain. He'd been up there 40 days and 40 nights and he had not come down yet, and that brings us to chapter 32.

Here's what we're gonna see today, we're gonna focus on the new fall, the wages of sin, and thirdly, we're going to see our only hope must be sent down by God. So first, let's see

the new fall. Now you say, "What do you mean by the new fall?" Chapter 32 of Exodus is reminiscent of the first fall. Now some of you know what I'm talking about when I say first fall, but some of you may not know. The first fall took place in Genesis 3 and by fall, here's what I mean and you'll see a definition that I think's helpful, the fall is a term used in Christianity to describe the transition of the first man and woman from a state of innocent obedience to God to a state of guilty disobedience. Now when I read that, immediately what should come to your mind is Adam and Eve. You'll remember that at the heart of the first fall was disobedience to God. God gave them a clear command, "You can eat of all of the trees in the garden except for one. You shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you do, you will surely die." And of course, we find in chapter 3 that they disobeyed this clear command and they were expelled from the garden.

Now with that as a backdrop, I hope you can see that in Exodus 32 we see the new fall, because after Genesis 3, we see God at work and we find God making promises to Abraham, he's gonna build a nation out of him, and he fulfills that promise and we see that unfold throughout the book of Genesis and throughout the book of Exodus to where now God has rescued this people, he's been gracious, he's been good, and now we have a new fall. In Exodus 20, you remember God gave clear commands, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." That literally means face-to-face with me. God gave a command also that, "Thou shalt have no graven images." The commands were clear, the commands were gracious, they were loving, yet the Israelites disobeyed. All of that's represented by Moses coming down the mountain and taking the tablets and smashing them. It was his way of saying, "The covenant's been broken. You've disobeyed." And do you notice that one word God used, he said, "So quickly. So quickly they've done this." In other words, it was just a matter of a few weeks that they were at the foot of the mountain getting the commandments and now just a few weeks later they are in the throes of spiritual sexual intimacy with another lover.

The Psalmist is even astonished when he writes in 106 of Psalms, "They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a metal image. They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass. They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt, wondrous works in the land of Ham, and awesome deeds by the Red Sea." The Psalmist was astonished. It's kind of like he's scratching his head, like, "What were they thinking?" I wonder what happens during the weeks that go by in our lives and we forget, we forget God our Savior and the great things that he's done. I wonder if there will be people that write about us and say, "What were they thinking? How could they forget such a great salvation?"

The nature of their disobedience is revealed in their demand. What did they want? They said, "Aaron, Aaron, get up and make us some gods. We need something to worship." And they made an image, a golden calf or a golden bull actually. You see, these were the kind of deities that were worshiped in Egypt. That's where they came out of and they got used to that, they got used to that culture. They still had that stink all over them. And it's interesting while they're doing this, while they're constructing their false worship, God is giving instructions to Moses to give to the people of true worship. It's interesting right

while that's going on. You read in chapters 25, 26, 27, all through there, God is giving instruction of how to worship him in the truest form and while he's doing that, they are instituting their own false worship.

They say, "We will do things this way, not his way." Exactly what happened in the book of Genesis and the first fall. "No, we're gonna do things our way, not God's way." They will manipulate religion to suit their own desires. These folks are being extremely religious, don't you see that? They're in step with the day of religion but it's going to be crafted toward their own desires.

They will have God but on their own terms. You notice they say, "We're gonna have a feast unto the LORD," capital letters, "unto the Creator, unto Jehovah, we're gonna have a feast for him. We're doing this for God." All the while they are mocking God. They want God as their mascot rather than their Master. They'll take God clothed in an American flag, "God and country, that's the God we want." That's the equivalent of today. God is a mascot but not a Master who demands faith and repentance.

And they do this, why? Because they are stiff-necked people. It's not a good thing when God calls you stiff-necked. It's not good. It's not because you need to see a chiropractor. Stiff-necked means it's speaking about a beast, like an oxen who will not put on the yoke for its master. It refuses. In other words, it's basically saying, "I'm too stubborn. I'm not gonna do what you say." That's what God means when he says, "These people are like an ox that will not put on the yoke for their good and obey me."

Now you look at this, I know, I know, I understand, I thought about this this week, you're gonna look at this and you're gonna go, "Preacher, look, I don't think there's a whole lot of danger in me going out this week and constructing a golden calf." I mean, I doubt very seriously of anybody even thinking anything like that. You're not gonna do that but would you construct a false god? Would you do that? I mean, you may not make a golden image, I understand that, but is it possible that we could construct our own false god?

Let me give you an example. Do we attempt to construct a god into a god we want him to be? In other words, we look at the attributes of God that we like, "These are the attributes I like, I like his mercy, I like his grace, I like his love." But we exclude wrath, we exclude holiness, and so we try to construct and be able to say, "I believe in God." Or is it possible that we could be guilty of constructing a god who we want to give us a lift on Sunday? "Meet with me on Sunday. Woo! Meet with me! Give me a lift! Give me a spiritual boost! But I will not give you any regard concerning my words and actions the rest of the week." Are we guilty of constructing, could we possibly do that? Could we construct a god like that? "I want a boost-building god for Sunday but the rest of the week, no." Or is it possible that we would construct a god, again whom we say we believe in? Oh yeah, if we're asked, "Yes, I believe. I believe in God." But this god requires no self-sacrifice, no obedience and no submission. Is it possible, is it possible that we may not build a golden calf but we will construct in our mind a false god? And friends, if we do it, we're not worshiping the God of the Bible, we're worshiping an idol.

We are just like these people in Exodus 32. God has stuck the key in the door and he's walked in and found us in the throes of sexual intimacy with a false god. It's a new fall.

These people are in trouble. It's not a light thing and we see that as we look next at the wages of sin. I think most of you are aware that there are really consequences for disobedience. In verse 10 let's hear what God had to say. Upon the events of 32 he said in verse 10, "Now therefore let me alone," he's speaking to Moses, "Let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them." Very unpopular. Very unpopular. Even us in the church, we often make, try to guard God from bad press, you know. If this gets out about God, people are not gonna like him. You know, so we've got to guard. Look, think back about the young married couple. I mean, let's put you on the end of the key unlocking and you walk in and you find the one that pledges their love to you in the throes of sexual intimacy with another, what are you gonna do? Are you gonna say, "Can I get you something to drink? You don't seem to be comfortable, can I get, can I make you comfortable?" We probably aren't going to do that, are we? I mean, it's very likely somebody's gonna get hurt. It's very likely somebody could die.

You see, the golden calf has been reduced to a pile of dust and mixed with water, people have been forced to drink it, we read that, but still the people have not really suffered the full consequence of their sin. We don't see that until verses 26 through 28 and I want to read it again because these are troubling verses. "Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, 'Who is on the LORD's side? Come to me.'" Notice first here there's an opportunity for repentance. Before we go any further, Moses, this is a serious moment. Moses is saying, "Alright, there's been a massive mess-up here but who's on the Lord's side? You've got a chance now to make a stand." The Levites come in verse 26, "all the sons of Levi gathered around him." Verse 27, "And he said to them, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.'" And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people died." Now I'm just gonna say it right upfront, that's a very troubling passage. These are the kind of passages that you find in books by skeptics, atheists, agnostics, you find it online, you find these are the kind of passages that they bring up and say, "This is repulsive." They would say to us, "How could you people possibly serve a God like this? I mean, what kind of God would call for this? This shouldn't be. You shouldn't have a God like this. I'm not gonna serve a God like this."

So what do we do with this? I want you to see a passage in Ecclesiastes 8 and this kind of helps me to think through this, work through this. Ecclesiastes 8:11, "Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil." Now that verse is pretty simple, I think. You know, there's an evil deed that takes place and there should be consequences for the evil deed, and they should be speedily. In other words, this should take place now, let the hammer drop now, but when it doesn't and some distance gets by, in other words, if we're having trouble with chapter 32 and especially verses 26 through 28, we're having trouble with this and I understand because this is very repulsive to the modern mind, if we're having trouble with this I just want to suggest a couple of things. First, it could be the distance. I mean,

we read this, this is something that happened hundreds of years ago and here we are sophisticated, intellectual, 2019 Americans who are very sensitive to things. We're compassionate. We're patient. Yeah, we're people who would think through our actions and so we're a little bit more crafty now and we look at this and we go, "Wait a minute. That doesn't seem that bad. They made a golden calf and they're having a little party, they're having a little get-together and it just doesn't seem that bad that such a harsh consequence would take place." Some distance has taken place since this happened. We feel differently about it, but let me ask you something: what about the victim?

Let me explain, this week the governor of California, Gavin Newsom, suspended the death penalty in his state. Now I'm not asking you, look, we're not gonna talk about how you feel or I feel, we're not gonna go there, okay? But when he did that, 737 criminals are on death row in California. Many of them have been there for years. The evil deed wasn't dealt with speedily. 737 criminals of a crime – now listen – a crime deserving of and receiving the sentence of the death penalty in one stroke of the pen suspended. So what appears to be lost in the mix of all of that? The crime. The victim. The victim's family. In other words, this person, this one of the 737 decided to commit their evil deed and it turned the lives of one, two, dozens of people all upside down, and some little prissy-pants governor comes in and with a stroke of a pen says, "I don't have any skin in this game. I don't have anything in this. I just suspend this." And maybe it's because there's distance between. Oh, this happened back in the '60s. This happened back in the '70s. We're much more enlightened now.

So I just want to suggest to you just, first, that one of the reasons we might have trouble understanding chapter 32 and the consequences is because of distance. The second thing I think is this: it's easy to lose sight of what's at stake. I want you to put your finger on verse 25 and I want you to see something and it's intended for us to see, "And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies)." Another way of saying that, they became the laughingstock of their enemies. Now why is that a big deal? Don't you remember just a few Sundays ago Exodus 19, "You are my treasured possession. You are to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation." In other words, God's saying to his people, "I've redeemed you, I've loved you, I've graced you. You are to represent me in this world." And what do we have here? When we fail to live godly, it will give God and his work a bad name. We, God's people, even God himself, become a laughingstock. They look and say, "See, I told you so. See, it's not real. None of this is real." You see, that's what was at stake here as well and notice how it's gonna effect future generations. God wants us to make his name known that people may come to him and experience his salvation, but when we become an obstacle, you see, that's what's at stake here.

So before – listen – before we go accusing God of disproportionate outrage, "Oh, what's wrong with God? He gets all upset. He's gonna pour out his wrath on these people." Before we think ill of God's disproportionate wrath and thinking that we know better and we are above such, we would never act like that, would we? Or would we? You've got your vacation all planned. You've saved up enough money to stay in a 5 star hotel. You've never been in a 5 star hotel before and you now realize why? Because it cost a lot

of money. You have invested, saved, you know, you've worked up to this time, this is going to be the vacation of a lifetime and we're gonna stay in a 5 star hotel. You get there and you put your bags down. You go out, enjoy the evening, you come home and you're wore out, you're ready to lay down. You pull the covers back and you see this and you are outraged. "I've spent all of my money. I've saved up. We've been planning for this. This shouldn't be." In your outrage, your moral indignation, you walk over to the telephone and as you're walking to pick it up you see this little critter crawl across the floor. Outrage. Friends, look, before we think that we're above such a response, such moral outrage, "What's God doing here?" We get outraged over stuff like that. We do.

So listen, beloved, what has happened in chapter 32 is what shouldn't be. What has happened in chapter 32 with God's redeemed, blessed, loved people, they have sinned against a holy God. Friend, this is serious business no matter what year it is and it is a sin that will not go unpunished and it is deserving of the wages of sin which is death. That's why we see what we see in the book of Exodus. God is a holy God and we've sinned against a holy God and, friends, our only hope as we conclude, our only hope must be sent down by God.

Leman Potter was arrested after his neighbor reported that a pot of meatballs had been stolen out of his garage. This is a true story, by the way. The police were called and they came and they found Leman standing out in his front yard with sauce all over his face. What an idiot. When I read that I thought, "Wow." He was just standing there with sauce all over his face. The Israelites have sauce on their face.

There is, I want you to see this, I hope you see this, there is no amount of good deeds that's going to cancel out their sin. We don't see Aaron going, "Hey, double up on the good deeds. We've gotta get this straightened out." You don't see that. We don't see people running around, "You know, we could fix this. We can fix this." No, no amount of good deeds will cancel out their sin anymore than you ordering a diet Coke to cancel out your cheeseburger and fries. It's not good deeds that are needed here. Bad situation. It's not good deeds that are needed here, what's needed is a mediator. A mediator.

Verse 7 we see it, verse 7, "And the LORD said to Moses, 'Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.'" The first thing you ought to notice that's interesting here, God doesn't refer to them as his people but go down for your people. Sin alienates us from God. God says, "Moses, go down, your people whom you brought out of Egypt, they've corrupted themselves." Have you ever thought about this at this point: God didn't need to do that. God didn't need to say, "Moses, you need to go down there." He could've destroyed the people in one snap of a finger. I mean, his wrath was already burning, he was already ready to destroy these people but the first little flicker, this little flicker of grace in verse 7, "Moses, go down. Go down." He sends Moses down demonstrating that he will save them through the intercession of a mediator. "Moses, go down."

Remember Moses is the very one that they have been trying to disown, the very one. It's always Moses' fault. It's Moses' fault. "You know, why did you get us out here? We don't

have anything to drink. We don't have anything to eat. What have you done to us?" The very one that they have tried to disown is the only one that can save them and turn away God's wrath. That's what the Psalmist said in Psalm 106, listen what he said, "Therefore he said he would destroy them," that's God, he would destroy them, "had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them." Right now for some of you, some of you not all of you but some of you, there's a little fireworks going off in your heart right now. You're putting this together. Some of you are, I know, and do you know why? Because the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that God has sent us a Mediator down to us. Yes. Though we deserve destruction for our sin, he saw our sin yet he wanted to save us. He saw the Israelites' sin, his wrath was burning because he's a holy God. There would be something wrong with God if he didn't burn against our sin. Yet he saw their sin and he says, "Moses, go down." Grace. Mercy. He saw our sin yet he wanted to save us so he sent his Son to intercede for us, to stand in the breach for us, God's chosen one, his beloved Son.

John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever should believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life." You know, another way of translating that is, "Go down, Jesus. Go down. Go down, Jesus. They're like sheep that has gone astray. Go down. Intercede for them. Unless you intercede for them, unless you stand in the breach for them they're gonna perish. Go down." And he did. And he did and because he did, he is our only hope.

Friend, you can't sing Amazing Grace enough. You can't Pledge Allegiance to the Flag enough. You can't vote Republican enough to save yourself. We are like the Israelites, no amount of good deeds is gonna save us. We need a Mediator to come down to save us and that's the gospel of Jesus. He did. He came. Have you believed in him? I mean, have you put your trust in him because, look, if you haven't, you remain in your sins and according to the Scripture the wrath of God abides upon you. It's only God's mercy that he hasn't snuffed you out but yet his mercy is rich and his grace is abounding. Will you, will you look to the Mediator that has been sent down to rescue you? Will you put your trust in him today?