

## Exodus 32-34 sermon Tregear 3<sup>rd</sup> April

This is the last week in Exodus. And again it's an amazing story. The horror story of the golden calf but then also the wonder of Moses kind of arguing with God.

Two key things I want to tackle today:

1. The making of the idol of the golden calf
2. Moses' conversation with God – what do we learn from these incidents?

One of the things we want to note is that Israel is gradually getting to know God better; this God is different to all the make believe gods of the other nations. They don't have all the understanding that we have. They're still learning. And today in this passage Israel learns a huge lesson that they will never forget.

Moses is up the mountain for 40 days and nights – a long time. So the people go to Aaron 32:1 - *Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.*"

Make Gods for us; come make us gods (can they hear how ridiculous that sounds) "Make" us gods. If you make them how can they be a god. What is their God like? He has revealed himself – spoken to them, delivered them, brought the plagues, defeated the Egyptian army, brought them through the Red Sea, provided food and water in the desert, clouds and thunder on the mountain. This make believe god can do nothing. How quickly they forget. and Aaron in a colossal leadership fail agrees. Collects the gold from them and makes golden calf and says This is the god who brought you out of Egypt. It's just this horror story of the faithlessness of the people of God – they're breaking all these commandments.

The worst thing that we can do with this story is treat it like a horror story; to think “Oh Gee, Israel they were awful. Everything about this is so obviously wrong and isn’t it great that we’re not like that.” But you know, every time this story is mentioned in the OT and the NT it never draws the conclusion that this was unusual; it always draws the conclusion that what they did is possible for us.

In the Bible this story is a warning of what could happen to us. In 1 Cor 10:1-5 Paul warns the Corinthian Christians that they can fall just like their ancestors, the Israelites.

You see the thing is that we still stand in the flesh, we are still under the same temptations as them. 1 Cor. 10:12 - <sup>12</sup> ***So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!*** If I look at a story like this and think that I could never do this thing Paul’s point is you could and there’s nothing stopping you. There certainly is a difference between the OT people of God before Jesus and the people of God after Jesus. We have God’s Spirit living in us and that makes a real and material difference for our lives as Christians; but one of the points at which we are not different is our susceptibility to temptation. No difference at all. The thing that happened to them could happen to us. There are temptations that swirl around your life and my life, that swirl around our church and there is no safety net. There is nothing external that will stop you from yielding to that temptation. The only thing we have is the word of God calling us back. That cliff has no fence. If you give in to temptation, if you walk away from the true and living God to unfaithfulness before God there is no fence there is only the word of God calling you back saying step away, come away from that place. So I want to say to you as it says in the psalm, “Do not harden your hearts as they did in the wilderness.” Hear his voice, listen to God’s word right now calling you back from the brink of temptation that could pull

you in, because the promise is also true that to those who hear the shepherd's voice he promises to keep faithful and see you through to the end. **The trick with temptation is not to stand and resist it but to flee. And the holy spirit's work is in helping us to flee.** Let me just say at this point that giving in to temptation doesn't mean we lose our salvation. No, but we don't want to be unfaithful, to not live up to our calling as God's people. We can see in the story of Ravi Zacharias or Brian Houston how giving in to temptation, not fleeing has devastating effects. God calls us to flee, and the Holy Spirit helps us to run away from that precipice. That's where the spirit is working and it might be quite specifically that the spirit is saying to you right now, step away to hear the shepherd's voice and to turn back to him. And one of the things that's going to help us to flee is running to God; immersing ourselves in his word, feeding our souls with him, having fellowship with him.

It would be good to think in your groups this week – What gods am I worshipping? What am I investing my energies in? Where am I getting my identity and significance from? Are we willing to give up other things in order to truly be with God? Am I fleeing from temptation?

And that leads us into Moses' talks with God

In 32:7 – God tells Moses what is happening down below and goes on to say that he is going to destroy the Israelites. And he makes the huge statement in v.10 – *“Then I will make you into a great nation”*. In other words, I'll do what I did at the time of Noah. I'll rub out the covenant promises that I made to Abraham and transfer them to you. This is probably one of Moses' best moments, because he doesn't take God up on his offer but identifies himself with his people. he now begins a discussion with God which goes back and forth for a while.

In 32: 11-14 – he gives God 2 reasons why he shouldn't do what he's said he'd do. And these two things are: the witness to the surrounding nations and the promise to Abraham. What will the Egyptians think – that you just brought out the Israelites to kill them in the desert – what kind of a god is that? Powerful. Yes. But also evil. Moses says you are not that god. You have bound yourself to your people – remember that. Also remember that you have bound yourself to Abraham, Isaac and note in v.13, normally it's Abraham , Isaac and Jacob. But what does Moses say, Israel. This was the new name that God gave to Jacob but it's not normally used when the three names are used together. Moses is saying you've bond yourself to Abraham – your honour is at stake, Lord. Remember, all through Exodus God is making himself known. Moses is saying, Lord we want you to be known as powerful and loving, a god who keep his promises. This is the god we want to proclaim to the nations. It's your name we want to honour.

And so the story goes on. In 32:31 Moses knows that the people's sin deserves judgement, that is only right. So he says to God in v.32, *"But now, please forgive their sin – but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written."* God refuses his plea here – God will not allow Moses to assume Israel's punishment, and pledges to punish the guilty. So he brings a plague and many are killed. But we also note that Israel does repent and mourn their sin. They have realised what they have done and where they stand before a holy God.

The next section, 33:12 – 18 is truly amazing. Moses is saying, You have told me to lead this people but who will go with me – what he's asking for here is Lord, you might take us up to the land but we need you to go with us. And again, Moses, says you have said to me that I have found favour in your sight, *if you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so that I may know you and continue to find favour with you.v.13)*

And then there's the really interesting section, v.14 – My presence will go with you and I will give you rest. The “you” here is singular so it's only Moses who will be given rest. Notice what Moses says now – *“If your Presence does not go with us do not send us from here.* Moses is pushing the fact again that God is the god of the Israelites. v.16 – *“how will anyone know that you are pleased with me AND WITH YOUR PEOPLE (Remember your people Lord, you've covenanted with them) unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and you people from all the other people on the face of the earth?”*

We need your presence Lord. What are we without your presence? That's what Moses is saying.

Someone has said, **Our greatest blessing is God himself** . The Israelites could have all the benefits that God gave them, food, the actual land, protection from enemies; but Moses is saying this is nothing if we don't have you. We need your presence with us. And he's not just meaning God just hanging around. He means having God himself, relationship with God.

And this is what God wants all along too. What is God's response? v. 17 – *“I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.”* I am pleased with you. Where else does God say this? Do you remember in Matthew's gospel that we read last year – chap 3 and 17 – God says to Jesus, this is my son, I am really pleased with him. *and I know you by name* –

One little thought here – Why wouldn't God go with them? This incident of the golden calf has given Israel a true understanding of their plight as sinners. How can they live with a holy God? So God, as we saw last week, has given the instructions for the tabernacle. They will need to continue to cleanse themselves before coming

into God's presence. But this hasn't been made yet or revealed to the people. If God goes with the people he might destroy them. He is a holy God; he can't just let rebellion, sin, be left unpunished – he is holy and loving. So we see what a blessing from God. With the tabernacle God is not only coming down to live amongst them, HE IS the holy God living amongst sinners. But they are his people. So he provides a way for them to become clean. This is the one who shows compassion, judgement and mercy.

And so we get these amazing words in v.6-9 -Moses has said to God, show me your glory. And God says I will pass before you while he hides Moses in the crevice in the rock. And then God speaks and what he says reveals his character: *The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.* And then in v.10 God renews the covenant with Israel. The conversation has come full circle. From initially intending to wipe out the Israelites he now renews the covenant with them.

But you may be thinking, there seems to be an apparent contradiction – God forgives sin and punishes my sin; so which is it? I think we're meant to feel the tension right through the Old Testament, until we get to the cross - we see how this can be at the cross – at the cross God punished my sin and he forgave my sin. Jesus took my punishment so that I could be forgiven. This is how God can be faithful to his name. God is faithful to his justice as my sin is punished at the cross and God is faithful to his mercy as I am forgiven through Christ. This is his glory. Moses said show me your glory. At the cross we see the perfection of God's holiness and mercy and justice and love. There is no other God like our god who dies for his people. And

so we go back to that verse we saw last week John 1:14 – *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* Can you see the strong link of this verse with our passage today. God has come to dwell with his people, the Israelites, to tabernacle with them. And Jesus comes to tabernacle with us. And Moses sees God’s glory as God makes his name known, the one who is compassionate and gracious, abounding in love and faithfulness. And what does John say – *full of grace and truth*. As we have seen, the Lord’s revealing his glory in Exodus indicates that he makes himself known for who he is. The same is true of glory in John. When Jesus makes his glory plain, he makes known who he is. When he makes plain the Father’s glory, he makes the Father known for who he is. So the moment when both the Son and the Father are glorified is really important.

Come with me to John 12:23 - <sup>23</sup> ***Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. <sup>25</sup>***

<sup>27</sup> ***“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name!”***

***Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” <sup>29</sup> The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.***

<sup>30</sup> ***Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. <sup>31</sup> Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup> And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” <sup>33</sup> He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.***

Here is the moment that God is most completely known, as the Father and the Son are both to be glorified in the crucifixion of Jesus. This hour is the hour in which the glory of Christ, who is the Word who was God and with God, is manifest, or revealed clearly, in grace and truth. This grace and truth, however, is expressed in the carrying out of judgement, as the ruler of the world is cast out, and as Jesus, as the Lamb of God, bears yours and my sin. In other words, the moment when God is most completely made known, in the Father and the Son, is the moment when, simultaneously, mercy is extended and judgement is executed. God has taken our punishment.

And when we get to gather round Jesus in his new kingdom our eyes won't be fixed on the gold, or the excitement of huge crowds, or the choirs of angels; our eyes will be fixed on the wounds in Christ's hands and side – this is God's glory.

And so Exodus finishes with the tabernacle being constructed, the priests made ready to serve in the tabernacle and God comes and hovers over the tabernacle in a cloud. God is there with his people.