**BCM Bible Study: February 17/18, 2021**

**Exodus 32: Golden Calf Part 1**

Introduction: Last week we talked about the tabernacle and how it was a means of God being present with his people. Did you feel connected to God this week? What do you think contributed to your sense of closeness with God?

This week we will begin a two-week study on Exodus 32-34. The tabernacle material is split by these chapters that recount a heartbreaking instance of disobedience on the part of the people. These chapters are (in my mind) some of the most amazing in the book of Exodus!

Things Unravel: **Read Exodus 32:1-6**

The Israelites were not worshipping a calf outright, as if to say, “This golden calf is our god!” Rather, idol-making for ancient people was a means of connecting with a god, like the ark. In other words, the calf represents a god; it is not thought of as a god itself. How does this help you understand what is being said in v.4?

* If an ark could be formed as a meeting place with God, why is what they are doing sinful?
	+ First and foremost, they are breaking the first and second commandments. They address multiple gods and make an image of a god. Why making an image of God is sinful is not clear here, but it seems that making an image of God diminishes his glory. It is to try to equate God with creation. Also, you may notice that this is an undoing of all that has been done in Exodus. See note #2 for more on this.
* They are worshipping a god or gods, but to do it in a way that ignores God’s revelation is to worship someone else than God. What could this look like for us?
* Why did the Israelites make a golden calf? What emotions, thoughts, and desires led them to that decision?
	+ “Idolatry is principally about redemption, understood as seeking one’s welfare apart from God.” (Ross Blackburn)
	+ In what way do you struggle with fear about your future?
	+ How do you try to can control of your life when things seem out of control?
	+ How should we engage with God when we are feeling afraid?

Moses Convinces God: **Read Exodus 32:7-14**

* What is God’s initial idea in response to Israel’s sin? (v.10)
	+ What do Moses’ words tell you about his character?
* What reasoning does Moses use to convince God to change his mind?
	+ “The grounds of Moses’ appeal are concerned solely with the Lord’s commitment to make himself known: as one who has a reputation to uphold…In other words, Moses grounds his plea for Israel in the interests of the Lord himself.” (Blackburn)
* Remember that God is fashioning a people to be a priestly nation (Ex.19:4-6) to show the world what he is like. Consider God’s choices at this point in time. He has a people who are prone to disobey, and thus will not show the world what he is like. On the other hand, if he destroys them, this will also mar his glory. How does this shed light on God’s anger in this situation?
	+ Moses’ primary concern is God’s glory and reputation. What would it look like if this was your primary concern? What might you be more/less concerned about? How might you act differently?
* What do you think of the idea that God changes his mind here?
	+ We often want to explain passages like this away by saying that God knew what he was going to do all along. While this may be true, the Bible paints a picture of God as having the “human” quality of considering the cries of his people and responding. Consider the very human picture of Jesus in Gethsemane, crying out for relief if possible. What does this mean about prayer?

The Aftermath: **Read Exodus 32:15-24**

* In what way does Aaron lie about what happened? Why do you think he did this?
* This account is reminiscent of Adam and Eve in the garden. Given a chance to own up, they pass the blame. This is the result of shame – when confronted with sin, we often hide, as did Adam and Eve.
	+ Have you ever found yourself in a place like Aaron, where you felt the need to hide what you’ve done or make your actions seem less unrighteous than what they were?
	+ Why is it so difficult to honestly share your shortcomings with others?
	+ Have you ever experienced someone handling your confession poorly? Handling it well?

**Read Exodus 32:25-35**

* Do you struggle with Old Testament stories like this one, where God commands and allows death? Why or why not?
	+ What does God’s reaction tell you about the seriousness of sin?
	+ Do you feel like the Church generally takes sin seriously enough?
* What does Moses suggest as a solution to appease God’s wrath? How do you see a picture of Jesus in what Moses offers to do?
* “The sacrificial system of the Old Testament as a whole is a precursor to what true atonement is supposed to look like. [But] God rejects Moses’ offer…because Moses is not suited to carry it out…He is by no stretch pure and blameless, as the Penateuch will elsewhere bear out. (Num. 20:12) The substitute must be one without blemish of fault, like the sacrificial animals of the Old Testament. It must be someone who is able to bear the burden of another’s guilt.
	+ God is extremely serious about sin. But look at what he does – **2 Corinthians 5:21**. How does this scene amplify the beauty of the cross?
* Do you tend to think of God more as angry with you or gracious to you?
	+ **Read Romans 6:1-2** and **Romans 8:1-2.**
	+ What is the balance between taking sin seriously and finding freedom in God’s grace?

Challenge: As an act of surrender, spend some time writing down the things that bring you anxiety. Pray about these things, asking for and surrendering to God’s help.

Notes

* Calves were a common idol during this time. Also, earrings frequently had significance in pagan cults.
* It is tragic to see that 32:1-6 represents an undoing of all we have seen so far in Exodus. First of all, their statement about the calf mirrors what God says in Exodus 20:2. Aaron’s rising early to sacrifice mirrors Moses activity in 24:4-5. And Aaron’s sacrifice is followed by “revelry” likely involving sexual activity (related to pagan cults) instead of a meal with God. Notice also allusions to the tabernacle with a sort of freewill offering, an altar, and a place built to meet with God.
* When Moses breaks the tablets, we are reminded that the one thing that Israel could not duplicate is gone – the law.
* The singing in v.18 is reminiscent of the singing after crossing the Red Sea. This is another instance of Israel trying to make their own god.
* Moses making them drink the dusty water seems unusual. But consider Numbers 5:12-31 where a woman suspected of adultery would drink a similar mixture to determine her guilt. This may also explain how they determined who would be killed in verses 27-28. The guilty ones would have been exposed. The rest remain guilty to some extent as evidenced by Moses’ need to intercede in verses 30-35.
* Some think that Aaron is not simply lying, but is recording the event as he experienced it – as a miracle. This, to me, is difficult to align with verses 1-6.
* To be blotted out of the book of life refers to death, not eternal condemnation.