

**Friday, March 24, 2023 ▫ Read Exodus 32:15–24**

*Questions from the Scripture text: Where does Moses go after interceding (v15)? What were in his hand? On which side were they written? Who had written them (v16)? Who heard what in v17? What did he think it was? But what did Moses say it was (v18)? Where did Moses come in v19? What two things did he see? How did this make him feel? What did he do in his anger? What else did he destroy (v20)? How? What did he do with it? To whom did Moses speak in v21? What does he ask him? What does Aaron request in v22? Whom does he blame? What does he recount in v23? What does he downplay in his account of the instructions (v24a, cf. v2)? What does he say about how the calf came about (v24b, cf. v4a)?*

**How bad is it to worship in the way that pleases us instead of in the way that the Lord has prescribed?** Exodus 32:15–24 looks forward to the evening sermon on the coming Lord’s Day. In these ten verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **idolatry makes war on God, makes war on reason, and even makes war on ourselves.**

**Idolatry: making war on God,** v15–19. The horror of Israel’s sin in vv1–14 is highlighted by v15–16 returning us to where we were in 31:18. God Himself has produced the tablets of stone.

Just as God Himself spoke the ten commandments, but uses Moses’s voice to speak the case law, so also God Himself writes the tablets but uses Moses to write the case law. The ten commandments are written in stone, but the Israel-specific law is written on paper.

While God has set aside the Israel-specific ceremonial law with the ceasing of that people to be a church, and the Israel-specific civil law with the ceasing of that people to be a state, He clearly has made a distinction about the Ten Commandments. They are an extension of His own character, Himself, and so are obligatory on all men in all ages—something that the New Testament also teaches. By breaking the first, second, third, and fourth commandments, Israel has assaulted God Himself.

So, there is an irony in the conversation between Joshua and Moses in vv17–18. As a mere function of auditory analysis, it is indeed the sound of singing (as Moses thought) rather than the sound of war (as Joshua thought). Perhaps Moses is informed by the Lord’s own revelation to him in v8.

But even knowing what they were doing did not prepare Moses for how horrific it actually was. When he sees the calf and the dancing, Moses’s own response in v19 precisely mirrors the Lord’s response in v10. In the spiritual analysis, the people think that it is the sound of celebration. But truly, spiritually, it is the sound of war upon God. Idolaters that we are, when we come up with our ways of worshiping God, we think it sounds like celebration. It does not occur to us how offensively and hostilely it is received in heaven.

The tablets’ function as a testimony of the covenant bond between Israel and God can be seen in what Moses does. Breaking them is not a rash response, just as it would not have been a rash response if God had destroyed them. Moses has functioned as the people’s representative to God in pleading for mercy in vv11–14. Now, he functions as God’s representative to the people in smashing the tablets in v19; it is a solemn testimony against them as having violated the covenantal bond.

**Idolatry: making war on reason and on oneself,** v20–24. Moses’s actions in v20 remind us of just how irrational idolatry is. What is the use of a “god” that can be burned? What is the use of a “god” that can be ground up? What is the use of a “god” that can be scattered? We might remember the faceplant of headless and handless Dagon (cf. 1Sa 5:3–4), the heat and cooking fuel usefulness of useless idols (cf. Isa 44:9–20, or Bel and Nebo being so heavy that they bring themselves and their worshipers into captivity together (cf. Isa 46:1–2)).

Most humiliatingly, the image that the Israelites used to worship “Yahweh” (purportedly) will end up passing through their digestive systems. It will be eliminated by their bowels. In the act of drinking in their wickedness, Moses makes them play out the self-harm that irrational idolatry causes (cf. Job 15:16; Prov 19:28; Isa 44:20).

We can also see the irrational self-harm of sin in v21–24.

Moses implies it in his question. The sin is so harmful that he implies that it could only make sense as some form of sick revenge (v21). Let leaders of churches who order the worship according to the desires of the people take this to heart: it harms the people so much that if its spiritual character is properly understood, such worship as might have them dancing is actually a vile assault upon their souls.

But it is also a vile assault upon Aaron’s own soul. Behold how low he has been brought spiritually—blaming the people whom he was supposed to protect like his first father Adam did upon falling (v22–23, cf. Gen 3:12), and then lying like the devil about how the calf was made (v24, cf. v4, Jn 8:44).

O, dear reader, what a dreadful thing it is to worship according to our pleasures instead of according to the Lord’s prescriptions! Such worship attacks God; such worship attacks those with whom we worship; such worship attacks our own souls.

**What are some ways that you are tempted to worship in way that pleases yourself instead of the way in which God has prescribed?**

*Sample prayer: Lord, how great is our idolatry! When we come to You in our own way, it is not actually to You that we come, but to a caricature that we have fabricated in our hearts. Such worship, crafted by ourselves, is a preference for You as we would wish You to be over You as You are. When we do this, Your Ten Commandments are right to call us “them that hate Me.” Even worse, in such worship we are prone to express ourselves without restraint, breaking the third commandment. And we are prone even to invent our own “holy time,” as if any time could be made holy by us. So, our idolatry very quickly violates the entire first table of Your law. Truly, such worship is the sound of war against You—hating the Lord our God with heart, soul, mind, and strength that were gifts from Him to begin with. How marvelous, then, that it was with our wretched sin that You made Christ, who knew no sin, to become sin upon His cross—so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him! For His sake, and for the love in which You have done this, forgive our sins, we pray. And cleanse us from all unrighteousness. For, we ask it in His holy Name, AMEN!*

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Excess 32 versus 15 through 24. These are God's words. And Moses turned and went down from the mountain and the two tablets of the testimony or anything. The tablets were written on both sides, on the one side, on the other. They were written. The tablets where the work of god and the writing was the writing of god and graven on the tablets.

From Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted. He said, to Moses, There's a noise of war in the camp. But he sent, It is not the noise of the shout of victory. Nor the noise of the cry of defeat. The sound of singing at you. So, it was as soon as he came near the camp.

That he saw the calf. And the dancing. So moses is anger became hot. And he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. Then he took the calf, which they had made. Burned it in the fire. Grounded to the powder. And scattered it on the water.

And made the children of Israel, drink it. Moses said to Aaron. Quite did this people do to you? That you have brought so great, a sin upon them. So Aaron said, do not let the anger, my lord become hot. You know, the people They are set on evil. For, they said to me.

Make us gods that shall go before us. As for this moses, the man who brought us out of the land of egypt. We do not know what has become of him. And i said to them, Whoever has any gold, let them break it off so they gave it to me.

I cast it into the fire in this. Calf came out.

So far the reading of god's inspired and And then toward In which we learned that idolatry is an act of war. There's an act of war upon god. There's an act of war upon reason. But it is an act of war. Upon ourselves. Moses has inside information. So, he knows what to expect, as he's going down the camp.

Lord has told him that they have. Started the sacrifice and feast. But joshua isn't sure. Joshua thinks there's only one thing that can make that much noise. And that is war. So, there's a dramatic irony in the text. And irony, where The characters and the people are. Doing one thing but we who are reading the account? Understand. Things in a way that Communicates to us how ironic it is.

And that is that they are actually. At war with god right now. They don't know it. But they have provoked God's wrath. Against them. Moses is interceded for them. But as we're going to see the in subsequent passages, the intercession needs to continue. It's a Joshua here. Here's it.

And Moses. Nope, that's not the shout of victory or the cry of the defeat That the sound of singing. That i hear. Now they don't know that they've attacked, god, it's not shot a victory. They don't know how dreadfully and wickedly and horribly defeated. They are They think that they are celebrating a holiday.

And yet. We know. And they should have known because they heard the lord thunder. The ten commandments from the top of the mountain. We know that they have. That what they are doing is actually Very offensive and hostile. To god. Although they think, That they are honoring him. With their singing.

It's quite dreadful, especially the lord. Highlights for us, this irony. Because he picks up in verse 15 where he had left off at the end of chapter 31, It said he gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony tablet system written with the finger of god and now verse 15 and Moses turned and went down the mountain and the two tablets of the testimony were in his hand.

And then he Emphasizes. Twice. The written on two sides and twice. That God himself wrote. It reminding us that these tablets are not only an expression of the character of god himself, but they are representative of the entire Uh, relationship between god and his people. And so, he says the tablets were written on both sides.

On the one side and on the other they were written. Okay. So that reduplication flipping it. That's one way of emphasizing thing in either. You have it very, very similar in the next verse. Now, the tablets were the work of god. Writing was the writing of god. Engraved on the tablets.

So, this law that is An expression of the character of god, and And then applies to all people in all places of all times. This law. God had spoken to the people. The other laws and commandments the ceremonial law to israel, as a church civil law to israel as the state Moses would be the one who would speak them.

This law is written in stone. The those laws would be written on Parchment. This law. It was written with the finger of god. Those would be written with the hand at Moses. And so we see how they're not just breaking god's rules. When we break the ten commandments, we're not just breaking rules.

We're attacking god themselves. So idolatry makes war on god. It also makes war upon reason. As the apostle says in, Our morning servant passage this week. And as Hezekiah prayed, In our serial reading this past week. They are not gods, which are made with hands. They are not gods which you can burn with fire.

That you're not gods which you can grind to powder. They are not gods which you can spread on water. And they are not gods, which can be ingested and have to be eliminated through your excretory system. Moses. Absolutely humiliates. This attack on all reason and all rationality. If there is a god, Then he Must be greater than we.

He must be the one who created us, and he has to be the one who tells us about himself and to tells us how to worship him. If we are deciding how to worship, That decision by itself. Implies that there is not an actual god. Because we came up out of workshop.

Much less can a god. Be the work of men's hands. And, Moses. Realizes when he sees, The calf and when he sees the dancing, Here are not people. Who are acting as if there is no god at all. That is contrary to reason. And it's contrary to god and he recognizes both of those things and he Uh, Who to whom yahweh had said, leave me alone that my wrath can burn hot against them and he had interceded and he comes And he sees, What the people have done?

They understand now, why the wrath burnt hot? And how much more amazing it must be now. That the lord relented. In response to his mediation. Because however, much Moses knows. The horror of their idolatry. When he sees the calf and sees the dancing as we're going to, Uh, c.

At the beginning of the next message, when he sees that the people are unrestrained. They're uninstructed. They're not covered by god's word, they're not governed by God's spirit, they're not governed by self-control. They're just expressing themselves. There are many who think that that's what worship is. In fact, they come into a service where god is known.

And by god's own appointed means we are drawing near. To the living, god. And they see the reverence and the reservation. And they say, oh, that must not be worshipped. They're not really excited. Well worship. Is a place where the living god expresses himself. And we respond to him in a way that is appropriate to those who are the creatures.

With reverence and awe because what he was 12 because our god is a consuming fire

Worship is not a place where we are to be unrestrained. And making displays of ourselves.

And so, he sees this And he sees a people who have rejected. The god with whom he has spent the last 40 days. If anyone was ever short that there is a god, it was Moses at this point. These people, these fools. That the base of this mountain. Just over a month ago.

God had so thundered, and smoked And shook everything. That they pleaded that Moses be the one to interact with him. They were absolutely certain That they were going to perish because of the reality of this god. But now, they are worshipping. By what they have made with their hands.

And in the way that they have come up with, with their heads, Idolatry is against reason and god box it throughout the bible. Remember Dagon, endless, headless Dagon. Who would be on his face before the ark except for you? No longer has a face. You remember, Isaiah? Talking about how carefully people would select the gold and the silver and craft everything and but they have to keep it from toppling.

So they have to do a really good job, making sure that it can stay up, right? They're how they take a piece of wood. Half of it, the car and they say, oh, you are my god. The other half they burn. So that they can have some supper and be warm at night.

And say, ah, I am warm, I've seen the fire Isaiah 44 in Isaiah 46. With the bell and Denebo. These idols of that are from the religion of the people who are coming to to attack the Judeans. But their copies of the Babylonian gods are so heavy. That the cart is stuck.

And they're unable to get the cart going. And so the cart and the people and the gods themselves all end up in captivity because the the gods were true heavy Or the Jeremiah 10 tree. That is cut down and decorated. And has to be you know, tethered to the wall so that it doesn't fall like digging did.

Our money. Our emotions. Our societies. Yeah, we have gotten. I think more sophisticated. In the irrationality. Of man-made worship. But it's still an attack upon god. And it's still an attack upon reason and ultimately it's an attack upon ourselves. The Lord tells us in his word that those who worship idols, become like them.

Unable to see unable to hear. Unable to reason properly. Wicked powerless, lifeless breathless. And it is righteous and it is just that it is so that might be part of what Moses was communicating to them. By making them drink their god. You love your idol. So much. Love the work of your hands so much, let it become a part of you.

He also implies it. When he asks Aaron, What did this people do to you? That you have brought so great to set up on them. You let them. Worship. The way they want it. You let them make war. On themselves and their own souls and have so much guilt before, god, and lose the fellowship, and word of god.

What did this people do? That you would let them worship the way they want it. Even the natural man knows or used to know. We have become so irrational given over to a depraved mind the number of people in our society who know it has diminished but even a rational man ought to know.

That it is a hateful thing to let a child. Do whatever they want. To give that child to whatever they want to eat. To let that child go to bed whenever they want to lock that child, do whatever they want to with their time. Especially to let that child get away with sin.

Although now we're moving from merely rational man to the spiritual man. It's hateful thing. It's a horrible thing. How much more? To let someone worship whatever. However, they won't And even now, What are called reformed and Presbyterian churches. Congregation sessions of elders. Who ought to have taken care of them.

Hand out. Worship surveys. To find out how the people are liking it. And what they would like better so that they can change it to suit the tastes of the people. And say, oh, we are. We are. Exegesis our circumstances and Um, culturally translating the worship of god. No, you're letting the people have, they what they want?

Which Moses when he sees and hears that about Aaron assumes that the people must have done something horrible because the only reason you would ever do this to somebody, let them worship the way that they want to is in revenge for some mortal offense. What did this people do to you?

That you have brought so greater sin. Upon them. And you see, don't you the responsibility of a husband? Or a father. For the sort of worship to, which he brings his family. You see the responsibility of elders? For the worship in which they lead the congregation. And there's nothing that congregation can do to a session of elders.

That would be so. Horrible. That it wouldn't be a hateful mistreatment in response that the elders would let them worship. However, they want But Aaron does what is the temptation of those who are in leadership? And we know that's because we saw it immediately upon the fault. The woman that you gave me.

You know. You should have known what she would be, like, because she gave me of the fruit and I ate Aaron says, You know, the people there said unable Blames others. Flatters Moses or at least tries to triangle Moses, you know, Moses. This wasn't just against god, it was also against you.

I really had to you were on the mountain too long. And you know that people can only endure so much mountain time. And so it's it's kind of your fault too and they were against you and I was just kind of sticking up for you and making

Coming up with, with a way to To pacify them. Well, we are waiting for you. For they said to be, make us gods that shall go up before us as for this Moses. The

man who has brought us out of the land of Egypt. We do not know. What has become of him?

So, he blames the people, he kind of blames Moses too. And, you know, tries to Yeah, stir Moses up against the people instead of against himself. And Deuteronomy 9. Moses lets us in on a little bit more of what happened here.

And he says, you always specifically wanted to eliminate Aaron

So, he Moses blames the people, sorry, not blows us. So Aaron blames the people and he Uh, tries to Make Moses a point of contention and then he just flat out lies. Says I said to them, whoever has any gold, let them break it off. So, they gave it to me and I casted into the fire.

I was just doing what you did, Moses. They gave me the gold. I threw it into the fire too. But when I threw it into the fire, The calf came out. Now, there are We have various ancient Near Eastern men's about gods of the nations that somehow created themselves, which of course, is irrational.

But You know. Nothing like the big danger evolution isn't. Material that creates itself. It's not much different. But Moses here or Aaron here is Just telling a bold faced lie. When we see then, The final way in which idolatry is an attack oneself because it doesn't just make you guilty.

It makes you more wicked. You cannot come up with the religion for yourself. Without becoming more of a slave of sin. Because there is only one thing. That can overcome sin and that is God himself by his grace And so if we come to God or we have our religion, according to things that we come up with Days and months and seasons and years, or do not touch, do not taste, do not handle doctrines of demons.

So you got the end of Colossians 2 and other things in first Corinthians 10, and the warning in first Timothy If we come up with our own religion religious ways, we can be sure that our sin will be inflamed. And so you see how Aaron's plunged into idolatry. Has really made him conduct himself.

Shockingly, wickedly here. Because the spirit has told us. How carefully heat carved and engraved? That thing himself?

So may the Lord deliver us. From worshiping the way that we want. Remove the Lord, spare us, who are And trusted with other spiritual care from letting them worship the way we want. Because it is an attack upon God. It is an attack upon reason. And it is an attack upon our own souls.

Father in heaven. In some ways, we are a little bit like Moses when he comes and Sees the calf and he sees the dancing. And it's starts to hit home, how great. The idolatry is how horrible a sin, it is. And we ourselves, oh God, have often. Desired that worship would be according to one or another preference of our own.

Or measured it by how much it pleased us. And here we are seeing in the mirror of your word. How bad that idolatry is and how Offensive to you and irrational and dangerous to us. And like Moses. Oh, Lord, we are Learning discovering, how great. How great has been your love?

To atone for us, how great has been your patients? To persist with us. Who have committed such sin against you? But your God have chosen, especially to glorify yourself. In your son. And you have given us to worship through him. Through his sacrifice through his righteousness. Through his priesthood, which he consecrated with his once, we're all sacrificed.

That we might not only be restored to worshipers, but being united to him by be adopted as your children. So we pray that you'd keep us from all idolatry. Lest we should be. Like the The false wicked impotent gods. And ways of worship that men come up with that, we would come up with And grant to us as we come to you through the Lord, Jesus the help of your spirit.

That he would apply to us our union with Christ. And give to us communion fellowship with Christ. And with you in him. That we might indeed be children of the living. God, Granted, we ask in Jesus name, Amen.