

## Exodus 32

### *Tending to Our Golden Calves*

How are your golden calves doing? We all have them. Not your legs, but golden calves like the one you read about in Exodus 32. How are yours doing?

Are you feeding them? Protecting them? Herding them along? Worshipping at their feet?

You say, "Ed, what are you talking about? I don't have any golden calves. I don't have any idols in my life."

Let's think about that today from God's perspective.

### **Open your Bibles to Exodus 32 Page 80**

The Book of Exodus is a narrative of God's activity and faithfulness to His chosen people. From beginning to end it's the story of God fulfilling His covenant promises.

Chapters 1-17 of the Book of Exodus have taken us from Israel's slavery in Egypt to the Hebrews being at the base of Mt. Sinai where God gives them His law. They're going to hang out there for just about a year.

Chapters 18 through the end of the Book of Exodus deal with Israel's experience at Sinai during that year.

Chapters 19-24 focus on God giving what we call the Mosaic Covenant. This is the 10 commandments and various laws that God set up for His people.

The Law had several purposes. It was to give the Jews God's standards in a systematic way. It was to distinguish them from the nations around them. The law provided health and societal direction. And finally, the law of God would show Israel the impossibility of living up to God's standards perfectly.

The Law of God would alert God's people to the fact that they needed Him as their Savior.

Chapters 25-31 and 35-40 deal with the plans and the construction of the tabernacle, along with its furnishings. We looked at the tabernacle last week.

If you missed that message I'd urge you to get the tape. The tabernacle was a powerful teaching tool about God's holiness but also about His love for His people.

God was showing His people that He was actually there for them and with them.

Then chapters 35-40 explain about how the tabernacle was constructed and how God showed His presences. He showed up in this cloud of glory and everybody worshipped.

But smack dab right in the middle of this glorious giving of the law of God with smoke, lightning, and thunder and then the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle is Chapter 32.

Exodus chapter 32 just reaches out and grabs you. It's so sharply different from the chapters before and after it that it makes you step back and wonder, what is going on?

What's really important to remember is that what takes place at the beginning of this chapter happens while Moses is up on the mountain with God getting instructions from God on holy worship.

Now the passage we're going to look at today is about idolatry. Its about people making a golden calf and worshipping it.

You might think, well, I can turn this one off. I don't need to hear this. Not only do I not have a golden calf at my house, none of my neighbors do either.

No ones got like this golden statue out by the BarBQ pit where they offer their steaks in worship before they grill them.

So do we really have a golden calf problem at Faith?

Here's my take on it.

When Sandy and I were in India a couple of months ago we did a lot of traveling by car. Every time you go out on the road in India it's an adventure.

There's the ubiquitous motor scooters. The husband drives and the wife sits sidesaddle with her sari on holding a child or two. There are big Tata trucks everywhere. There's lots of cars honking and passing each other in death defying moves.

In any town you'll find thousands of three wheeled taxis and bazillions of bicycles.

But in all that there's also horse drawn carts, and depending on where you are monkeys, pigs, even elephants. But the thing you really notice is the cows.

Since cows are sacred, in a lot of places in India you'll see them just roaming free. In fact in Delhi, which is a city of 13 million you could have a cow in the middle of rush hour traffic.

There's all the traffic going around this cow. The cow is sleeping undisturbed.

Well, sometimes our ideas of God. Our concept of God is like a sacred cow. It's right there in the middle of the business of our life, but we protect it.

Frank King puts it this way: I put God in a box and then I go to great lengths to leave my image of God alone. I don't allow it to change and grow.

The boxes may be labeled cosmic cop, rescue squad, divine vending machine, or perhaps something else. But as soon as I confine God to a segment of my life and decide how and when God may act in my life, it will have dire consequences. It's not that God will abandon me, but I will be abandoning part of who God is and how God acts.

Listen, here's where I think we get ourselves in trouble.

Our false images of God, these sacred cows become our golden calves, taking the place of God and substituting a cheap imitation. In other words, pagan idol worshippers aren't the only people who make their own gods.

Now why is that we'd make our own god. What would ever possess us to fashion a golden calf? There are whole bunch of reasons coming in every shape and size. Let's look at 4 from our passage.

*I. We Make Our Own Gods Because Of Impatience* **Read vs 1**

There's absolutely no excuse for what the people do. There's no justification for the golden calf thing. In fact, it's so wicked God's going to talk about wiping them off the face of the planet.

But still, I think we can understand their uneasiness.

For 400 years they've been slaves under the Egyptian pharaohs. They've been treated as nobodies, scum of the earth, they've had no sense of national pride or any leadership. They've never had a homeland to call their own.

Suddenly Moses comes on the scene and rallies the troops. The time is right and God has chosen Moses to be the deliverer.

So the people who had no direction and leadership suddenly have a man who turns rivers to blood, covers the land in thick darkness, and pronounces judgment on all the Egyptian firstborn.

Not only that, but he leads everybody out of Egypt and when Pharaoh's army is closing in lifts his staff and the Red Sea splits to let them through and then closes up again on Pharaoh's army.

Moses was their commander, leader, deliverer, and most importantly, he's their contact point with God. He talks with God. He gets direction from God. He's their communication link with the almighty.

**Now flip back real quick to Exodus 24 and read verse 18.**

Moses has been up on the mountain for 6 weeks. Well over a million people are wondering what's happened to him. Wouldn't you?

They weren't going up looking for him. **Read 24:16-17**

In chapter 20 at the giving of the 10 commandments it says: *Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die."* (20:18-19)

**Now back to chapter 32.**

Moses is gone for weeks and in their mind that's too long. The operative word is "delayed." The Hebrew word *boosh* that's translated "delayed" is a negative word. It's used about 100 times in the OT and it's usually translated "ashamed."

It doesn't just mean they thought Moses was taking his good old time, it meant they thought he was off schedule. Something had happened to him.

Now granted, 6 weeks was a long time not knowing what's going on. I can understand some of their confusion. But these are the people who had lived through all the miracles of the plagues, splitting the Red Sea, manna in the wilderness, water from the rock.

In every instance Moses said, "Watch what God is doing." He didn't take credit for himself. Everything that happened was a "God thing" and Moses made sure the people understood that.

They had all that evidence, but they still thought there was a delay. Something was wrong. They got impatient. They were ready to fall back to what was probably their common old way of doing things.

They said to Aaron, "Make us some gods." We don't have Moses to lead us. We don't just want to hang around here in the wilderness forever. Make us some gods to lead us."

They had a sacred cow. They imagined what God should be like and what He should be doing and when He should be doing it. The God they had in that box wasn't coming through for them. So they wanted to make their own god. Have you ever been angry, upset, confused, stressed out, because you *thought* you knew what God was doing, but as time went on (day after day, maybe week after week, maybe year after year) it seems like God is dragging His feet?

The God that you had in the box wouldn't let you go through what your going through as long as you've been going through it.

Did you notice it says, "When the people saw?" The decision of God's people to act apart from following God's will was based upon what they could "see."

Moses was in the presence of the One true God. God was in the process of revealing His divine plan for His people for the ages. What could be more important than waiting until they heard from God?

But what they saw didn't compute. What they experienced didn't make sense. It wasn't logical. So they said, "OK, we're done with that god lets get another one!"

We live in an “instant society.” When we want to look something up we don’t want to go to the library, search through volumes, write out notes: we want to “Google it” and get it now.

When we have to wait 5 minutes in the drive through a Burger King we say, “What’s the hold up there?” When we want to talk with someone, we’re annoyed if they don’t answer their cell phone.

And into this instant society comes a God who says, “Be still,” “Wait upon the Lord.” The God who is timeless says to us who are so ruled by time, “Just trust me. If I said it, I’ll get it done at exactly the right time.

God’s time for you might be next week or it might be in the next decade.

You say, “Whoa. Next decade. That’s not what I want to hear!” It doesn’t fit my God idea.”

That’s when we need to remember point 2 from our passage.

- I. *We Make Our Own Gods Because Of Impatience*
- II. *We Make Our Own Gods Because of Lack of Faith*

### **Read verse 2-4a**

Talk about lack of faith. Who was Aaron? He the brother of Moses. He’s been at Moses side from the day he first confronted Pharaoh.

In Exodus 4 God spoke directly to Aaron. In Exodus 5 when Pharaoh spoke he said, “*Moses and Aaron why do you stir up the people?*” In chapter 7 Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent. Exodus 8 *Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt, and Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod and struck the dust of the earth, and it became lice on man and beast.*

Exodus 11 *Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh...*

Aaron didn’t get second hand information about God’s power. He had a front row seat. He got it in high definition, surround sound, the whole deal.

Now the people are clamoring for a homemade god and he obliges. Apparently God isn’t living up to his expectations either.

This chapter is so shocking because it shows us a man who has been in the ministry, on the front lines, with every advantage of experience and first-hand knowledge, who totally blows it.

Aaron totally collapses.

Why? For one thing at this point his faith was crumbling.

People say all the time “If I could just see a miracle. If I could just hear God’s voice. If I could have some tangible demonstration of God, then I could believe God. Then I could really have faith.”

You know what it looks like to me? The people in the Bible who saw God seem to have the same struggles with faith as those who didn’t see God.

I don’t see any measurable difference. In the end everybody’s got to live by faith. In the end everybody’s got to trust God.

Aaron was hands on with the Almighty, but when push came to shove, he still wilted.

I believe that the reason this chapter is here, and is so important, is so that we’ll see that we’re all vulnerable to confusion and doubt. God is still gracious. He still forgives and leads us, but every one of us is vulnerable.

If Aaron could fail, so can we.

That’s why it’s so important to be involved in Bible study, to have other Christians who can encourage you, to be in church worshipping.

We need to constantly have our minds renewed because our culture and our human nature want us to doubt.

The fact is that faith is the very heart of our relationship with God.

God confirmed through His law that there’s a penalty for sin. That penalty is death. The Bible, as well as our own experience, confirm that none of us are perfect.

God is perfect. His standards are perfect. His law is perfect. But we aren’t. In fact the Bible says, We’ve all sinned and fall far short of God’s glory.

How is a perfect God going to forgive sinful members of His creation? How is a holy God going to accept people who fail Him, like the best of us repeatedly do?

He provided a Savior. That Savior was His own Son.

Somebody was telling me the other day about their harrowing experience at Ocean City this year. Because of all the hurricanes the surf was rough and the undertow was powerful.

They got out a little too far and suddenly they realized they weren't going to make it back in to shore.

Fortunately they were within sight of a lifeguard stand and were rescued. They were saved from death by a lifeguard.

Now suppose they would have been out in the waves, strength gone, unable to keep their head above the surface and the lifeguard would have come by and dropped off a book "Three Easy Lessons on How to Swim."

Would they have been saved?

What if the lifeguard would have come out and said, "Watch me. Just do what I do." And then he'd demonstrate the backstroke.

Would they have been saved?

That's the way a lot of people see spiritual things. They think that the Bible is a book of instructions for getting to heaven and that Jesus was our example of how to do it.

The fact is, when your out in the ocean being overcome by the tide you need someone to pull you in to shore. If you could do it yourself you wouldn't be drowning. The lifeguard isn't your savior if he can't get you to shore and you're not saved if you can't get there.

God says this:

Isaiah 43:11 *I, even I, am the LORD, And besides Me there is no savior.*

Isaiah 45:21 *...there is no other God besides Me, A just God and a Savior.*



Ho 13:4 *“Yet I am the LORD your God Ever since the land of Egypt, And you shall know no God but Me; For there is no Savior besides Me.*

Our forgiveness can only come through a Savior. And just like the lifeguard we can't do anything to save ourselves except completely trust. We have no strength, no ability, no capacity.

The Bible says: Galatians 2:16 *Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*

God's Law is perfect. But it can't save us because we can't keep it perfectly. God is our Savior and our hope has to be in Him.

Faith is the very heart of our relationship with God. It's where we start with Him. And faith and trust in God day by day is what keeps us out of the god making business.

*So, We Make Our Own Gods Because Of Impatience. We Make Our Own Gods Because of Lack of Faith.*

### *III We Make Our Own Gods Because Of Peer Pressure*

#### **Read verses 4b-6**

I don't picture this as being a sweet, gentle bunch who come to Aaron and say nicely, "Could you please make us a god."

This is a restless crowd. An agitated crowd. This is an angry crowd. And Aaron gave in to them.

We don't know if he argued with them for a while. We don't know if he debated and gave all the reasons why it would be wrong to make an idol. We don't get a specific time frame here.

What we do know is, Aaron buckled under the pressure.

Have you ever done that? Unfortunately, it's not that unusual,

- \*a teenager gets pressure from the crowd and engages in behavior they know is wrong
- \*an employee gets pressure from their boss and does something illegal
- \*an adult gets pressure from society to accumulate stuff they can't pay for
- \*a child feels pressure from a parent and lies to avoid consequences

When we face pressure we often act like Aaron. We fold under the pressure without considering the consequences of our actions.

The Winter 1991 issue of the University of Pacific Review gave this description of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster:

There were two electrical engineers in the control room that night, performing what the Soviets later described as an unauthorized experiment. They were trying to see how long a turbine would "free wheel" when they took the power off it.

In order to get the reactor down to that kind of power, where they could perform the test they had to manually override six separate computer-driven alarm systems. One by one, rather than shutting off the experiment, they shut off the alarms and kept going. The results were nuclear fallout that was recorded all around the world, from the largest industrial accident ever to occur in the world.

When we play with sin we do just what those engineers were doing. We are ignoring God's warnings. And as we tune out his warnings long enough, we become unable to hear them anymore.

Look at what happened to the Israelites. They made and worshipped an idol. That escalated into a party that moved into all kinds of sordid behavior. They forgot that God gives us commands not to "control" us but to guide us.

Here's the NT principle for dealing with pressure: *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.* Romans 12:1-2

Here's how that's rendered in The Message paraphrase:

*Take your everyday, ordinary life--your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-*

*around life--and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out.*

- I. We Make Our Own Gods Because Of Impatience*
- II. We Make Our Own Gods Because of Lack of Faith*
- III. We Make Our Own Gods Because Of Peer Pressure*
- IV. We Make Our Own Gods Because We Aren't Honest With Ourselves or With God*

**Read verses 7, 19-24**

What's this? Moses has been up on the mountain with God. When he finds out what's going on he pleads with God not to just wipe everybody out then he confronts Aaron.

What did this people do to you? Did they string you up by your thumbs? Did they put bamboo shoots under your fingernails? Did they put you in the iron maiden and tighten the screws? Moses is totally incredulous.

So Aaron says to his brother, "You know how these people are. You've had to deal with them before. They were angry and demanding."

So first of all Aaron tries to blame shift and blame the people. And I don't doubt that he was under pressure with the people. They could have been a pretty threatening bunch.

But no one can make you sin. Aaron was lying to make himself look better. But he doesn't stop there.

He says, "So I gathered up their gold earrings, threw them in a fire, and lo and behold this calf popped out. You should have seen it Moses. It was unbelievable."

Now what's he doing? Besides just lying, now he's blaming God. "It's God's fault, Moses. All I did was to throw the gold into the fire. God must have shaped it into a calf."

I've heard people say, "God must have wanted me to leave my marriage and hook up with this other guy He brought into my life." Or "God put the hundred dollar

bill there on the floor of the bar so I could pay my rent this month.”

God gets credit for all kinds of things. We want a God that acts in a certain way. We want a God who arranges life the way we want it so we pop the gold in the fire and out comes a golden calf.

It's a lie. We're totally dishonest. But, we convince ourselves and others that it's true.

The temptation to idolatry that the people of Israel faced wasn't unique. The temptation to look to idols for security or for religious fulfillment is just as great today as it was back then.

But God has revealed the truth to us about security and fulfillment in Him. The only way to be secure, the only way to be truly fulfilled, is to have faith in Jesus Christ. And he's placed us here today so we can encourage one another to remain faithful to Jesus Christ rather than turning to the idols of our day.

Let's pray for each other. Not just for jobs and good health, but that we'll avoid the temptation to look to gods other than the true and living God and his Son Jesus Christ.

Pray for the leaders of this church that they'll be godly men and women who follow the examples of Moses, and of Jesus Christ: prepared to lead by example, in humility.