

Exodus 32-4

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[0 : 00] Exodus 32-34. I love the God of the New Testament, but I really don't love the God of the Old Testament. Do you hear that? I hear that occasionally, I hear that quite often. I might not say to me as Christian Union, I like the God of the New Testament, but I really don't like the God of the Old Testament. Or people say, don't go all Old Testament on me or something like that.

I was going to see you once, and I thought I'd take that on a little bit, so I read a few strong words from Matthew 23, kind of walling passages. And a person said it, I don't know that. And then you turn to a passage like Leviticus 34. And in some ways the passage that we're going to look at today in Exodus 34 where it says, The Lord, the Lord of God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

The person said, oh I like that. That's a little last from Sinai. And it is a complete myth. You cannot divide the God of the Old and the New Testament.

He's the same God. If you want to rip out that little blank page between the Old and the New Testament, feel free, go for it, even in the church Bibles. The God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament cannot be differentiated.

[1 : 26] They are the same person. As you read the New Testament, you find many strong warnings that really scare you. Healthily scare you. And you can read some very comforting, incredibly moving verses in the Old Testament.

And the verses that we're going to end up in in Exodus 34 are a great example of that today. We're at a wonderful event in Exodus 32 to 34. It starts tragically and it ends wonderfully.

And it's quoted ten times in the New Testament. So it's a formative event. But more than that, it's exactly what you need this morning. If you've come to church, which you have, at least in body, this is what you need.

If you want to work out why it is that the human race, and you are a member of the human race, can never quite escape your demons, this passage really helps explain and help you.

It's very humbling. And very helpful indeed. It's just what you need if you're wondering about someone you love, or maybe even yourself.

[2 : 33] Can you ever be rescued from your waywardness, and your mistakes, and your sin, and your foolishness? So here it is in Exodus 32 to 34.

We discover that God is absolutely sufficient, that he is all you need. So I want to divide it into two parts. First of all, the tragedy, and then the triumph. Let's think about that. First of all, the tragedy of idolatry.

There's hardly, is there, a more famous idol in all the world than the golden calf. Here are the people of God, and you remember, he has rescued them, he has instructed them, he's taught them, God has given them the Ten Commandments, and he's met with them, he's had a meal with many of them on the mountain.

And he's planned a way for them to have a safe relationship with him, because of the tabernacle. He said, I will be with you. And the tabernacle is where there will be sacrifices that are offered, and a relationship with God is sustained.

And so here at this point in Exodus, it's quite a peaceful time at Sinai. A slightly scary time, but everything is peaceful. Rescued, agreeable, covenant time, we could call it.

[3 : 43] And then we read in chapter 32 of Exodus, verses 1 and 2, that when the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down, they gathered around there in the number 2, and they said, come, make us gods.

Come and make us gods who will go before us. And as for this fellow Moses, the guy who brought us up from out the land of Egypt, we said to you at the end of verse 1, we don't even know what's

becoming.

And his absence is striking. It's what, six weeks? That's the time he's been gone. And it's significant. And in those six weeks, they are asking Aaron to make a gong to go before them. They want someone to follow. They are impatient. And they're finding it very difficult to cope with the invisibility. They are not good at standing on the promises and the word of God.

They want something they can feel or latch on to. They want a symbol. And up and down now, that has been Moses. Moses really has been the symbol of God's authority.

[4 : 45] And now they want something they can focus on. And unfortunately, Moses' brother Aaron is desperately stupid and desperately weak. And he gives in and he caves in. He tells him to collect the gold, which you've been given when you left Egypt by the Egyptians, and make what is certainly a bull.

It is almost certainly a bull. I cannot understand why the ESV have translated it as a calf. It is almost to think it was a calf. A bull was a symbol. It was a symbol of Egypt, a power and a strength.

And so one commentator says, getting Egypt out of Israel was far harder than getting Israel out of Egypt. Can you get that? You can take the Israelites out of Egypt, but you can't take Egypt out of Israel.

Now look at verse 5, which again is very interesting, isn't it? It's not necessarily to replace God. When Aaron saw he built an altar, didn't he, in front of the bull.

And Aaron made a proclamation. And he said, tomorrow shall we have a feast to the Lord, to Yahweh. So we mustn't think that here the Israelites, they're thinking, right, let's get rid of God.

[5 : 55] They're not thinking that. What the Israelites are doing here is they are reshaping God. So do you remember commandment number one? What was commandment number one?

Don't worship the wrong God. And they said, well we're not going to worship the wrong God. Yahweh is our God. What's commandment number two?

Commandment number two says, don't worship the right God in the wrong way. And they said, that doesn't really matter. That's not important.

And after a while, you worship the wrong God when you do that. We're happy to worship the right God in the wrong way.

And of course, isn't it, if you keep worshipping the right God in the wrong way, after a while you worship the wrong God. Which is why is it, theology is so important, the study of God is so important.

[6 : 53] You must never fall for those people who tell you that too much theology, too much study of God and his word is a bad thing. We've got to be, haven't we, as clear as we can, because there's so many people that have got a faulty idea.

You and I have in many ways. And if you follow that peculiar idea, that particular faulty idea, if you follow that way, well it actually takes you a very long way from the truth.

Even though in the early days it might seem so serious at all. One commentator, Philip Rykin says this, we are committed, we are tempted to commit the same kind of sins. We are not fully satisfied with God ourselves.

We don't trust him to work things out his own way in his own time. And so we turn away from his law. Coming up with our own strategies for making life work on our terms.

We bow to the false gods of success and control and beauty and pleasure. We pay more attention to our occupations and our entertainments than we do to serving the only true God.

[7 : 56] We also worship the true God falsely. We may not be tempted to make a golden calf, but we are tempted to turn the God who is there into the God we would like him to be. We want God to teach our minds, but not to transform our hearts.

We want God to give us a lift to worship him on Sunday, but we don't actually want him to govern all our words and actions the rest of the week. We want him to change others, but we don't want him to change us.

We want his love, we like his holiness. We want his mercy, we want his justice. It's very important to see that. It's very important to see it in the Israelites, but it's very important to see it in ourselves.

There's a crisis that is taking place in Old Testament history. There's no doubt about that. It is a crisis, but it's not a one-off idolatry. It's not a one-off kind of thing.

It's a very, very significant moment of idolatry. And this chapter is going to show us, it's going to show us how God is bigger than idolatry. You see, let me remind you again, I remind you each

week, isn't it, that chapter 32 comes after, well, Exodus chapter 20.

[9 : 12] Doesn't it? The Ten Commandments. Ten Commandments are wonderful, aren't they? Are they? But the Ten Commandments haven't helped. The Ten Commandments are perfect.

But they've not changed the hearts of the people. There they are up on the mountain. They've got the Ten Commandments. They've had 12 chapters of instruction from God, and yet their hearts are not transformed.

And that is what Israel needs to learn. That is what we need to know. Let me read you again from Phil, sorry for all the quotes, but it's a good one. The people promised not to worship false gods. Do you remember that? Or not to make images of the true God. They made a covenant commitment to save God alone. Yet their covenant barely had time to dry before they were dancing around the golden calf, breaking the very laws they'd sworn to keep.

How easy it is to tell God that we'll never do something ever again, and then go right ahead and do it. This is especially true with sins of addictions.

[10 : 13] Gluttons tell God they're going to stop overeating. Sex addicts say they will never use pornography again. Drunks swear they've had their last drink. How easy to re-offend. Why do people do this?

We all do it in one way or another. However, we all struggle to overcome patterns of habitual sin. We keep getting tempted to commit some sin again and again and again.

And the reason we struggle is because the sin is in our hearts and not in the refrigerator. In our hearts and not in the magazine rack or on the internet. The story of the golden calf helps us see this.

The Bible says in their hearts they turned back to Egypt. They didn't even need someone to tempt them. With an idol. They simply produced one. Out of the wickedness of their own hearts.

Be very clear on this. Exodus chapter 32 teaches you and I very clearly that as long as we've got a sinful heart and every single one of us here this morning has got a sinful heart we will have it for the whole of our lives even when we're Christians.

[11 : 23] And God by his spirit takes up residence in our hearts we still have a sinful heart. And as long as we've got that sinful heart we've got a factory that is capable of making our lives.

And that is why the solution is not the Ten Commandments. And that is why the solution is not kind of more ethics in school. The solution is one that can reach the heart.

One that can forgive and strengthen. One that can forgive again and strengthen. And that is Jesus Christ isn't it? And Jesus Christ alone. We need God's mercy to forgive us and that comes through Christ.

We need the covenant of God to secure us and that comes to us through Christ. We need the spirit of God to help us and that comes to us through Christ. We need the glory of God to grip us and we see that in Christ.

And you'll see that the idol which was so promising wasn't it? Failed miserably. And that is the tragedy of idolatry isn't it? I know this.

[12 : 29] I fall for an idol and it fails me. I fall for an idol and it fails me and I think I'm not going to fall for that idol ever again. And then I fall for an idol.

And it fails me. And you do the same. That's the tragedy of idolatry. It promises to add something and yet it always subtracts.

And that is why, as the people of God, we are so grateful for the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why in our services we basically rehearse the gospel week after week after week.

Because it reminds us of Jesus Christ who is able to forgive us. It is Jesus Christ who says the words of pardon after the confession of sin. It is Jesus Christ who calls us to worship him.

It is Jesus Christ who is the one who is able to keep. Because your heart and my heart is a sinful heart. Well that's the tragedy of idolatry. Let's turn to the triumph of God.

[13 : 28] And it's a wonderful passage, isn't it? Particularly Exodus 34. It gives us something to sing about. I was reading about that hymn that they traditionally sang on the Titanic.

You know on the film Titanic they're playing it on the tune as the book is going down. Nobody knows whether they actually really did or not. But the hymn is Nearer my God to thee Nearer to thee And it's actually a pretty awful hymn really.

It's a pretty woeful hymn. It's very vacuous. There's not much meaning to it. It's empty. It doesn't give you good reasons for hope when you're going down on the Titanic.

It just basically says I'm getting nearer to thee. It would have been great if they would have had a head of his neck. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus Christ Jesus' blood and righteousness.

Or they were saying God is our strength and refuge. Or praise to the Lord the almighty King of creation would have been appropriate. On Christ the solid rock I stand.

[14:33] It would have been good if they had solid reasons. A solid hymn with reasons. Exodus 33 and 34 give us wonderful reasons for hope this morning.

So look at verse 7 of chapter 32 with me. And you will see how God responds to idolatry. He says go down Moses.

Go down because your people whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They've been quick to turn from what I commanded them.

They've turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf, bull and have worshipped it and sacrificed for it and said these are your gods O Israel who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

And the Lord said to Moses I have seen this people and behold it is a stiff neck stubborn people.

Verse 10 Now therefore leave me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them that I may consume them in order to make a great nation for you.

[15:44] Well those are remarkable verses isn't it? It looks like doesn't it for a moment that God has given up. God has given up on them. It looks as if he's going to desert them. But on a superficial reading it looks like that.

But I want to say if you read it more carefully listen to what God is doing. God is feeding Moses lines isn't it? Don't you? The great joys of marriage isn't it?

As you get to know someone you know that if you say something you can get the other person to respond isn't it? My dad is the same. If I give my dad just certain lines I know he will go off on one.

We do that don't we? I hope you do it please with me. And this is what God is doing. God is feeding Moses lines. Who brought them out of Egypt? And it wasn't Moses was it?

It was God who brought them out of Egypt. I will make you into a great nation. Who am I going to make you into a great nation for? Was it Moses? No it was Abraham wasn't it? That line?

[16:41] I have made promises to you. God is feeding lines to Moses. He wants Moses to react. He wants him to get back to God on this. He wants Moses to start speaking to God and praying to God and interceding for God.

God is raising up an intercessor. Somebody will pray for his people. Why is he raising up an intercessor? Because God wants to save his people. And Moses begins to pray.

He only prays 12 verses in 93 of the verses. In chapter 32, 33 and 34. They are very brief prayers but I don't know whether you picked it up before you came to church and read it.

They are wonderful prayers. There's a little secret of six. And God is very respectful. Moses is very respectful. Please do not fall for the idea that you can speak disrespectfully for God.

It seems to be everywhere at the moment I see it. You can speak honestly to God. Praise God for that. But he is still God. And we must speak to him as if he is God.

[17:41] And say exactly what we're thinking. And Moses speaks respectfully to God. He's not trying to get God to change his plans. He is trying to get God to stay with his plans.

Which is of course exactly what God has promised to do. Let's think about it. Number one. Chapter 32 verses 11. And it's a prayer for God's repetition. He basically says and I won't read the verses.

He basically says oh God why be angry with the people that you've saved? Why let Egypt slam you and mock you and say look at this God. He got them out but he can't keep them.

Or he got them out so that he can kill them. What kind of God is he? And Moses says why let your reputation be completely destroyed? Turn from your hand the Lord.

Remember your promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God remember your reputation. And of course that is something that pleases God isn't it? Immensely. And so God does exactly what he's being asked to do.

[18:42] Which is what he wants to do. He turns from his hand and he relented and the nation is spared and the idol ground into powder and the people are made to drink it.

And the ringleaders are killed. And if we get upset about that that the ringleaders are killed we need to remember that Moses has just come down from the mountain and seen God face to face. And for Moses the question is not how can God punish the ringleaders.

The question is how can God not destroy everybody? Second prayer is in chapter 32 and verse 31 and this is a prayer for God's pardon. It's one thing isn't it if God's anger turned your way it's another thing to be pardoned.

If you've got a friend who is angry with you it's one thing for them to stop being angry with you but it's another thing for them to forgive you. As Moses says in 32-31 don't be angry forgive.

And in verse 32 it is a remarkable verse isn't it? Do you see what he says there? Forgive them or blot me out. Blot me out of your book. If not please blot me out of your book that you've written.

[19 : 54] Ensure here that Moses is being a true shepherd. What is Moses doing? He said I will die for the sheep. But of course that's no substitution at all is it?

Because Moses is sinful himself. But he loves them he loves them even though they are a pain in the neck and God doesn't take Moses up on the offer. He says in verse 34 there's no guarantee I'm going to continue with you.

All I want you to do says God is lead the people. My angel will go before you. And in verse 5 of chapter 33 if I went with you I might destroy you.

Now it's a very awkward situation for Moses. God has turned his anger away but God says I'm not travelling with you. Well chapter 33 in verse 12 if you look there it's a prayer for information number 3.

And incidentally this prayer takes place in the tent of meeting. There's a tent of meeting don't confuse that with the tabernacle there was inside the tabernacle a tent of meeting but there was another tent of meeting and this tent of meeting is the one we see in 33 verse 7 that was outside the camp.

[21 : 07] The tabernacle do you remember was right in the centre of the camp. The tabernacle has not been built yet but the tent of meeting was there so that Moses and others could go and in this tent of meeting in chapter 33 verse 12 Moses effectively says please God who is going with us?

You say we are friends what is happening? You say we are your people please would you tell us who is going with us? Are we just on our own now? And in chapter 33 verse 14 the Lord says my presence will go with you ok I will go with you and then he says God says I will give you rest I will give you singular rest now this is very tempting you see because Moses is being offered a break from the people and a new start and Moses is being offered safety himself and no longer having to carry this huge difficult bunch of people but Moses is something of the love of God in his heart and he doesn't want these people to be lost and neither does God fourth prayer is in chapter 33 verse 15 and it's for the presence of God he says if your presence doesn't go with us don't send us because God actually the only thing that matters is that you are with us can I just stop for a minute and ask you to tune back in if you've drifted away because can you see that this is a wonderful prayer to pray isn't it oh God

I don't know exactly what's going to happen on Sunday morning this person is leading out at Sunday school these people are doing the kids Sunday school for the first time there's a few families away and if there's new people who will talk to them who will have them back for lunch and I must make sure I speak to such and such who's got a tough week ahead the balance of the hymns is not right there's 500 people that want to be prayed for in the service and will be upset if they don't get prayed for the sermon is potentially a bit long and it's a bit dry please Lord may it go well this morning is that really what we want to pray for for Sunday mornings don't we want as the people of God to meet with God don't we really want in some way for God to draw near us he has promised to be with us when we meet in his name when two or three are gathered and we are really asking that God would be impactful in us of course he's always with us but we are praying that when we gather as the people of God in the name of God to worship God to set under the word of God preached by the man of God that God would be with us for change and for comfort we don't just want the business of church life do we?

I don't know about you but the last thing I want is just a photocopier that works and a piano that works and a coffee urn that works and that is our church we don't want the business of church we don't just want to be a program and a calendar and the stuff goes on we don't want nominal Christianity we don't want Christless Christianity oh God if the whole building and the whole building project and all the printing and all the coffee disappears and we have to meet under a tree on Drayton Green drawn near to us because if we don't have you we don't have anything and that is what Moses is praying and the answer comes back in chapter 33 verse 17 I'll do what you ask the fifth prayer is the climax really in chapter 33 verse 18 God prays for Moses prays for God's glory

show me your glory now possibly he's wanting some proof but probably he's asking God to show can you do this are you great enough for this

God are you able and the Lord says come up the mountain and I will hide you in the cleft of the rock because if you see my face you will die and I will pass by and you will see my name proclaimed or you will hear my name proclaimed and he hides Moses from the cleft of the rock and he declares himself and he announces himself and he doesn't show much at all does he but he says something very very significant chapter 34 verse 6 the Lord passed before him and proclaimed the Lord the Lord a God merciful and gracious slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness keeping steadfast love for thousands and Moses suddenly realises that the answer to the wrath of God and the answer to the judgment of God and the answer to the seriousness of God is God it is his mercy and it is his forgiveness and it is his kindness and it is his sacrificial love and he bows down and he worships because he recognises that God is

[26 : 17] God and God is able to do in mercy what his sin is calling for the final and sixth prayer is in chapter 34 verse 9 where Moses simply prays that he will have covenant fellowship with God take us as your inheritance and in chapter 34 verse 10 God re-echoes the covenant and he reminds them to keep the feasts that will help them to keep remembering him and will keep them being thankful for him and the last little section in Exodus 34 in the tent of meeting Moses face was bright and brilliant and radiant so there is a veil put over his face why does he put a veil over his face does he put a veil over his face because the people were frightened well yes they are frightened but that is not why Moses put a veil over his face does he put a veil over his face because it is too bright and they haven't got kind of sunglasses they are not aware of the UV rays of course that is not the reason he puts the veil over his face because we are told in the New Testament because the brightness faded and he didn't want the veil over his face and the veil over his face the old covenant was a fading covenant the old covenant had no transforming power it had no converting power but the new covenant is a covenant of transformation because Jesus died on the cross and he achieved salvation and the moment you put your trust in him you have received salvation you have received eternal life you have received the Holy Spirit and God begins to transform you the new covenant is not a fading covenant we go from one degree of glory to another degree of glory and that is why

Paul says in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 we are not fading we are being transformed now what do we learn from this passage there is lots of stories there number one learn this that God is the answer the most wonderful answer to idolatry he is of course infinitely more valuable than all idols so think of a person that you know who is absolutely devoted to an idol whether it's their work or their husband or wife or their children and I want you to picture that person as the decades run out and as they go over the cliff of judgment and the idol is completely useless and so how much do we need to help people who belong to Christ because Jesus Christ is infinitely more valuable than idols Jesus Christ is more satisfying than idols we are foolishness we forget this don't we we think that we will really be fulfilled if we get that relationship if God gives us this place to live we will be really ultimately fulfilled if we get this kind of job and we forget that God is merciful and gracious to save us and to forgive us from our idols because we read in the Bible don't we that God is able to save completely those who come to him that's the first thing God is the answer to idolatry and if you put your faith in him he will keep bringing you back from your idols the reason why you feel discontent is because God is kind he is a saving God secondly 2 Corinthians 10 tells us that this passage Exodus 32 has been written as a warning for you and it is to warn you against idolatry if you've got an idol if you've got a God with a small g that you cannot live without this

God if it's called pleasure or power or self or somebody or success or whatever it is that you just cannot live without and if God took that away life would not be worth living if you've got something that you just cannot live without and it's not God that idol will kill you that idol will damn you for all eternity and that is why the Bible constantly says turn for your idols to the living God and when you do that what's he like merciful gracious slow drang abounding in love steadfast that's how you become a Christian that's how you continue on as a Christian isn't it that as we continue to walk following the Lord Jesus we need to turn from our idols again and again that hymn is the dearest idol

I have known whatever that idol be help me Lord to tear it from thy throne it's God's throne and worship only thee idols are so tricky aren't they they trick us again and again and again and again third thing last thing we need to learn how gracious God is to arrange a mediator mediator

somebody who stands in between he raises up Moses doesn't he Moses is raised up to do the praying Moses is not going to do the saving we know that but he's going to do the praying and he's going to call down all the mercy of God and how wonderful it is that God gives each one of us the role of intercessors of prayers I'm so grateful for people here who pray for the ministry of IPC we have the great privilege of praying for one another and interceding for one another and God takes our intercession incredibly seriously and you may feel that your prayers are sleepy and ordinary but God takes your prayers offered in the name of the

[32 : 36] Lord Jesus incredibly seriously and God does wonderful things through our prayer Alibatia makes this really brilliant point that we have to pray like Moses in line with the word of God let me read it to you true prayer matches the knowing will of God what God reveals if God has made his mind known on any given subject no amount of prayer will change it it's pointless to say we have prayed about it so we know it's right well I get that an awful lot I know this religion is different I know that it's not right for me to go out and not Christian I know that it's not right for me to do this and yet I prayed about it and somehow I've got peace about it well where God has made his will known true prayer will take down the issue and learn to say your will be done rather than please be so good God to think again intercession is a great great privilege and it's a ministry but it's right to end here is how especially grateful we are that God has raised up a mediator who is one greater than Moses who is the Lord

Jesus Christ who does not only live to pray for us whoever lives to intercede for us but he actually is the mediator who links us to God and he joins us to God in a covenant that can never be removed and how thankful we are for one who is able to save us from our hearts our idolatrous hearts because that's our biggest problem let's thank him today let's pray let's pray Thank you.