

THE HEART OF AN INTERCESSOR

EXODUS 32:1-35

We are back in the desert to join the Israelites on their journey to the promised land. From the time we met them in Egypt and as we started the journey with them up to this point Sin has not figured much in the Exodus story so far. Even in Chapter 12 there is no reference to any sinfulness of Israel in connection with the blood of the Passover lamb. The exclusive effectiveness of the blood on that memorable night was to relieve the wrath of the Lord, so that He could pass over Israel's houses in peace. From the beginning of the book of Exodus to this point, "Sin" seems as if it were something that might yet happen, but need not to happen.

Allow me to remind you brothers and sisters that God went to great trouble to free Israel from the bondage of Egypt: Changing Water to blood, frogs, lice, flies, diseased cattle, boils, hail and fire, locusts, darkness, death of first born.

When they came to the Red Sea, they looked behind them and saw the Egyptians pursuing them. Everyone was afraid. The Israelites accused Moses of bringing them out to the desert just to die. Moses stretched out his hand and rod over the Red Sea. The wind blew all night. The sea began to part. God was holding the Egyptians back with a pillar of fire. The crossing of the Red Sea is believed to have been $\frac{1}{2}$ mile wide and 10 miles long. For 3,000,000 people to cross they needed to be lined up 1,000 deep by 3,000 long. Then, as they reached the other shore, the Lord removed the pillar of fire and allowed the Egyptians to follow. God took away the chariot wheels. Then the walls of water caved in on the enemy. No wonder Miriam and the women sang and danced and played tambourines. What awesome deliverance.

Now, God calls Moses up to the mountain. This is where and when Moses received the layout for the tabernacle, tables of stone with 10 commandments, and other instructions. Moses has been on the mountain for forty days. Remember that no one had told the people how long Moses was going to be away. The people became impatient. They came to the conclusion that Moses was never coming back. In the ancient world, a community was bound together by religion. The way to hold a community together was through a common faith, and perhaps even more strongly, through a common ritual.

With Moses gone, the leaders of the Israelite community are concerned to preserve unity. In 2nd commandment God has told them very clearly not to make any graven image. So the action of making a golden calf is a direct repudiation of Moses as the covenant mediator.

If Moses has simply run off into the desert, then he is a faithless covenant mediator, and all that he taught them in Exodus 20-24 could be set aside. So the people have rejected Moses as covenant mediator, and rejected the revelation of the Ten Commandments. They come to

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Aaron and urge him to make gods for them. He commands them to give him all their earrings of gold, and he carefully fashions a golden calf. Note that Aaron did this for God out of flesh. You can see in Exodus 32: 4 (**This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt**).

There is a difference between the worship of God before this chapter and the worship taking place here in Exodus 32.

Before this chapter it is God who initiates the covenant with his people; it is the Word of God (the book of the covenant) that explains and interprets the sacrifices (the blood of the covenant). Before this chapter God commands his people to abstain from sexual immorality and there is an overwhelming sense of the holiness of God; and the redemption takes the center stage.

In Exodus 32 however, it is the people who initiate the covenant with an idol; in this chapter god is silent and man must interpret the ritual for himself; and as a result of worshipping an idol is a shameful orgy. In Exodus 32 there is an overwhelming sense of the primacy of man and as a result human desire takes the center stage.

This is a fair contrast between God's covenant, and all idol covenants; this a fair contrast between the worship of God and all idolatrous worship.

God sees from above what the Israelites have done and is angry. Verses 7-10 describe God's response to this sort of worship. He is angry. Our God is a jealous God and does not stand the worship of any other than Him.

So in verse 10 God declares that he intends to destroy the Israelites and then will make Moses into a great nation.

What is surprising is Moses response to God's intent. **Verse 11 Then Moses entreated the Lord his God, and said, "O Lord, why does Your anger burn against Your People whom You brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?"**

Why does Moses respond the way he does? Why doesn't Moses submit to the will of God? Why does Moses challenge God himself? This passage has puzzled generations of scholars. Is God simply testing Moses? Does God really mean what he says? Would he really have destroyed Israel and made a great nation out of Moses?

Let us recall God's visit to Abraham where he reveals his intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham also challenges God. In that case there were not even ten righteous men in Sodom, so the judgment on Sodom stood. But Moses is simply following in the footsteps of his forebear in challenging God's intentions.

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But why? Why do Abraham and Moses challenge God's intentions? Abraham and Moses are both covenant mediators. A covenant mediator speaks to man on behalf of God, but also speaks to God on behalf of man. To put it another way, the covenant mediator is a member of the divine council. The scriptures frequently speak of God consulting with angels or God consulting with himself, but also in these passages God consults with man. Adam, after all, was created as the son of God. It is not that God needs man's counsel or angelic councillors, but rather, out of his pure grace, God has chosen to give this honor to his creatures.

This is no place for false modesty, and so Moses comes straight to the point: (v11-13). As Adrian rightly preached last Sunday like Elijah, Moses believes the promises of God. If God is to remain faithful to his promises, then he cannot act in this fashion. Did God need Moses to remind him of this? Of course not! But God revealed his anger to Moses, so that Moses (and we) might understand his wrath against sin. Israel deserved to be stricken from the face of the earth. Moses, as the only faithful Israelite, would see God's promises.

When we see our sin, when we understand the righteousness of God, and what we deserve from him, then our only refuge is in the promise of God. Because now Jesus Christ, the mediator of a better covenant, is seated at the right hand of God interceding for us and pleading before the throne of grace, by the power of his own blood. Now, there is a man who sits in the divine council forever! And so brings eternal life to those who believe in him, and call upon his name as it is written in Romans 10: 13: "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved".

Verse 14 says that "**The Lord changed His mind**". God will preserve his people, Israel, but he must still deal with their sin. And now Moses, the one who had interceded on their behalf, speaking to God on behalf of man, must now take the lead in speaking to man on behalf of God. Moses came down the mountain and broke the two tablets on the ground. The Ten Commandments which are the covenant of God with Israel had been violated. Not just by an individual but by the whole community. In the covenant at Sinai, individual covenant breaking could be dealt with, but if the whole community broke the covenant together, there was no redress. As long as the community was faithful, individual faithlessness could be dealt with. But what happens when the community itself was faithless?

First Moses burnt the calf, ground it to powder, scattered it on the water, and made the Israelites drink it. The bitter waters are to be a reminder of the results of idolatry and a foretaste of judgment to come. Then Moses turns to Aaron: 21-24. Aaron's response is pitiful. He sounds like a child trying to convince his parents that it was an accident. A high priest who allows the people to convince him to make a graven image less than six weeks after the commandment was given, is not the sort of high priest that we need! God mentioned this event several times in Scripture (**Neh. 9:18; Psa. 106:19; Acts 7:41**). This indicates that this was an event that was significant in that God recounts it time and time again.

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Then Moses' steps up leadership and had to restore order and discipline. Moses calls out (v26-28). The Levites come and slaughter 3,000 of their neighbors out of zeal for the Lord. This is their corporate ordination to the priesthood. Their faithfulness to God, in the midst of the idolatry results in the blessing that they will now serve in the tabernacle and temple as long as Israel exists as a covenant people.

Finally, Moses returns to the mountain and seeks to make atonement for the people. Notice how he does this: v31-4.

Moses pleads with God to forgive Israel, and note the way he puts it: **"If not, please blot me out of the book that you have written. If you will not forgive Israel, then blot me out of the Book of Life as well"**. God's response makes it clear that this approach is not possible: **"Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book"**. In the end, it will only contain the names of the righteous. In **Luke 10:20** Jesus speaks of this book, saying, **"Rejoice that your names are written in heaven."** In **Phil 4:3** Paul speaks of his fellow laborers in Colossae, **"whose names are in the book of life."** **Rev. 3:5**: **"The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life."** The implication is plain. If your name is found in the book of life, then you will live forever. If your name is not found there, you will be thrown into the lake of fire. Plague of judgement was sent to discipline the people for what they did.

We can learn from Aaron that pressure will bring out what is really there in us.

It is important to notice that God's choice of Aaron was clearly not because of his strength of character. Nor was he rejected for his weakness. Need to get serious with God - He means business! God disciplines His people to shows us what He thinks of sin, and how He has to treat it.

Pause a moment and think of the cross. It is worth that we thank Jesus for the cross! He took our punishment and now He is our Intercessor!

Moses interceded for Israel out of love and care for his people and out of desperation as he stood there learning about what God intended to do in anger. **"If your name is found in the book of life, then you will live forever. If your name is not found there, you will be thrown into the lake of fire"**, Jesus said. This is not said to scare us but I believe that God is looking for a heart-change in us.

Today, as we gather together as Christians on this mountain in communion with God, strange idolatry takes place in our cities. But the Bible says that **"Whosoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not belived? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear witout a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent"**?

Brother and sisters, as we come down from the Mountain of worship and walk on our streets, Christ has called us to preach the Good News. The Good News about Jesus who died on the

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cross and took away our sins and reconcialed us with God. We are to preach the Good News and we are to pray to God through Christ to save those we love. There is a great need for Intercessors. There is a call for The Ministry of Intercessession (vs 11-13) characterised by fervant prayers (vs 30-32). In those days, only Moses could go to the Mountain and Intercede for his people. Today, we can all come and intercede for our people and God in His mercy and with grace will deliver the Nation and make it His own.