

“God’s Plan of Mercy”
Exodus 32:7-14
(Preached at Trinity, April 12, 2009)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Last week we began the sad account of God’s people falling into gross idolatry. Moses had been upon Mount Sinai many days communing with God. Israel began to be impatient. What could possibly be taking so long. Perhaps he’s abandoned us. How do we even know if he’s still alive?
Exodus 32:1 – “we wot not what is become of him.”
2. It may have begun with a one or two outspoken people making comments of discontent. Seeds of discord spread quickly. There were no strong leaders to quickly intervene and put an end to the murmuring and it soon grew to a feverish pitch.
3. They began to confront Aaron with their demands. **Verse 1** tells us they gathered “unto” Aaron. The NAS does a much better job in translating the preposition – “the people gathered about Aaron.” The NIV translates it, “they gathered around Aaron.” They were forceful in their demands.
4. Aaron was the second in command but rather than rebuke them for their sin of murmuring and treason he gave them his ear. He should have ended it there. Effective leadership means sometimes going against popular opinion. Sometimes it means you have to say no.
5. The people came making demands.
“Up, make us gods” – The word means, “arise, stand up” – it’s in the imperative. They were making demands.
6. It would take a strong leader to resist them. Aaron was not that leader.
 - A. Aaron ordered them to tear off their golden earrings and fashioned for them a golden calf – an idol in the form of a young bull.
 - B. He probably got the idea of the golden calf from his experience in Egypt. There were many Egyptian cults dedicated to the bull.
We know the Israelites had been guilty of idolatry in Egypt.
Joshua 24:14 – “Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD.”
 - C. The word “gods” in **Verse 1** is plural – “make us gods.” The verb “go” is also third person plural. The KJV and ESV accurately translate it as plural.
This is also consistent with the Egyptian worship of many gods.
Again in **Verse 4** – “These *be* thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.”
7. Israel was trying to combine the idolatry of Egypt with the worship of God. God immediately took notice:
Exodus 32:7 – “And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted *themselves*.”
8. Tonight I want to direct your attention to this passage.

I. The Corruption

Exodus 32:7 – “thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted *themselves*.”

A. It happened quickly –

Exodus 32:8 – “They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them”

1. It had not been that long since the Sinai experience; since they pledged their undying allegiance to God.
How quickly they were ready to forget God. How quickly they had forgotten their pledge.

Exodus 19:8 – “And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD.”

Exodus 24:3 – “And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do.”

2. Now they were prepared to cast their allegiance to other gods and give them the glory for their deliverance from Egypt
3. Adam sinned almost immediately in the garden
We came forth from our mother’s womb sinning against God
5. No sooner than we pledged allegiance to Christ we fell into sin
 - a. We’ve allowed our tongues to murmur
 - b. We’ve set our affections on the things of this world
 - c. We have not been fully satisfied with Christ

B. They forsook God’s Law

Exodus 32:8 – “they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These *be* thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.”

1. God said He would not be worshipped through external devices
2. They were more enamored by the object than with God
3. The so called worship wars sometimes demonstrate this sin

C. God took notice

Exodus 32:9 – “I have seen this people, and, behold, it *is* a stiffnecked people:”

1. The Egyptian gods were tame gods. You need not tremble before them
They were dead inventions of the human heart

2. The prophets of Baal cried to their gods for hours
1 Kings 18:26 – “[they] called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But *there was no voice, nor any that answered.*”

Listen to Elijah mock them:

1 Kings 18:27 – “Cry aloud: for he *is* a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, *or* peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.”

3. God doesn’t sleep or slumber. He’s never away. He’s never unaware.

II. The Condemnation

A. They came under God's wrath

Exodus 32:10 – “Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them”

1. God is not a tame God. He is a jealous God – jealous for His glory, His holiness, His people. His anger is kindled against all who would assault His holiness.
2. God's anger was kindled against Israel – it was a raging fire
Deuteronomy 4:23-24 – “Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of any *thing*, which the LORD thy God hath forbidden thee. ²⁴ For the LORD thy God *is* a consuming fire, *even* a jealous God.”

B. Israel fell under God's judgment

Exodus 32:10 – “Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them”

1. On Mount Sinai God gave the penalty for idolatry and false worship
"visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children"
2. Sin shall not go unpunished
Psalm 7:11-12 – "God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry *with the wicked* every day. ¹² If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready."
3. In the Second Commandment God equates the false worship of Him as hating Him - “of them that hate me”
4. To hate God is consistent with those who do not know Him
Romans 1:30 – “haters of God”

C. Man's sin doesn't hinder God's purpose

Exodus 32:10 – “and I will make of thee a great nation.”

1. God's purpose in history has been to redeem His people from their sin
NOTHING will ever hinder this
2. Look at the fearful thing for Israel
God's covenant with Israel was a conditional covenant
Exodus 19:5 – “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine:”
 - a. Notice the change in how God addresses them. Before He has referred to them as His people and He as their God.
Exodus 29:46 – “And they shall know that I *am* the LORD their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I *am* the LORD their God.”
 - b. Now God refers to them as “this people”
Exodus 32:9 – “And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it *is* a stiffnecked people:”
 - c. God says, “I will consume them and then continue my promise to Abraham through Moses.”
3. The New Covenant is unconditional. We can sin against God and deprive ourselves of the joy of sharing in His great work, but we will not hinder His work.

III. The Compassion – Moses interceded for his people

Exodus 32:11 – “And Moses besought the LORD his God”

- A. Moses could have responded in a selfish manner
 1. God was about to bless Moses as the new covenant head
 2. A lesser man might have been lifted up in pride – but not Moses
 3. As a Godly leader and as Israel’s mediator he began to plead with God interceding for his people.
- B. He reasoned with God – **Verses 11-12**
 1. Notice Moses did not try to diminish their sin or try to make excuses for them. He did not say, “God, I really have been gone a long time.”
 2. Moses laid down his argument
 - a. He reminded God that Israel was His people
V.11 – “why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people”
 - b. He reminded God that His glory was at stake. What would the heathen nations think if God destroyed His people?
Moses was most concerned for the glory of God.
 - c. He plead for God’s mercy
V. 12 – “Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people.”
Moses knew God’s judgment was just. He was asking for God’s mercy
 3. It isn’t wrong to lay your case before God, to plead with Him.
 4. With Moses it wasn’t an act of dishonor but an act of love for His people and God’s glory. There’s no higher motive
- C. He recited God’s promises before Him
 1. It’s been said that prayer is reciting God’s promises back to Him
 2. Moses reminded God of His covenant promises to Abraham
Exodus 32:13 – “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit *it* for ever.”
- D. Oh that we would be people of prayer
 1. We should be always approaching the throne of God resting on His promises, pleading our case before God
 2. Oh, that we would be people that would plead the case of others, to have such a love for others that we plead on their behalf.

IV. The Conclusion

Exodus 32:14 – “And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.”

A. God responded to Moses’ intercession

Exodus 32:14 – “And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.”

1. The question is, did God change His mind?
“and the LORD repented”
 - a. The word for “repented” means “to be sorry or regret”
Many translations translate it, “changed His mind”
 - b. Some hold that God planned to destroy them but then changed His mind
2. Open Theists hold that this is proof that God does not know the future but is working out things as they happen.
 - a. God can be doing one thing today, but due to changing circumstances, do something different tomorrow.
They teach that God may change His mind based upon new information that He was previously unaware of
 - b. For one Open Theist, when God saw the wickedness of man on the earth it cause Him pain so He destroyed the earth in the flood. But upon seeing the destruction it cause Him more pain so He promised to never do it again.
 - c. In **Exodus 32**, according to the Open Theist, God fully intended to destroy Israel but changed His mind on the basis of Moses’ prayer
 - d. According to the Open Theist, this is the most simple and straight forward reading of the text. But the simple and straightforward reading of the text may not be the proper reading of the text.
This is the problem with those who take a literalist approach to hermeneutics.
3. The Bible describes the very nature of God as being unchanging. God is immutable.
Numbers 23:19 – “God *is* not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do *it*? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?”
It is no more possible for God to change His mind than it is for Him to lie.
1 Samuel 15:29 – “And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he *is* not a man, that he should repent.”
3. Texts like this are best interpreted as anthropomorphic.
Anthropomorphism is when you ascribe human attributes to God.
 - a. Human beings change their minds based upon new information
 - b. First, God knows all things and so is not capable of acquiring new information
 - c. Second, God knows all of His actions from all eternity so His actions are all planned from all eternity

- B. It was never God's purpose to destroy Israel
1. Mercy has always been God's eternal plan
 2. They were indeed under His wrath. They were indeed worthy of death. But God had predetermined to show them mercy.
 3. God would not have needed to send Moses down if He was determined to destroy them. He would have just destroyed them immediately.
 4. The same thing is true of God's elect people today
 - a. God chose us from all eternity to be the recipients of His mercy
 - b. It is true that while we were lost in our sin we were under the wrath of God. God was angry with us. We were the subjects of Satan and were heading to hell.
 - c. Upon our faith and repentance God's wrath was turned away, but God had always purposed to show us mercy

Conclusion:

1. God does all things for His glory. All things have been ordained. Yet, God works in the lives of His people in time and history. He acts today, hears prayer today.
2. Our prayers are effectual today. God has ordained our prayers. He told Moses, "Go down Moses." He had determined Moses to be their mediator. Had Moses not gone God would have destroyed Israel.
3. Do you understand how important your prayers are? Are you praying for your children, your church, our nation?
4. There's one more thing I want you to see here.
There's a greater Mediator than Moses. A Mediator the God sent down to intercede on our behalf. "God down Jesus." Jesus pleads for us, not on the basis of our righteousness but His. Jesus prays, "Save them on the basis of the covenant we made before the world began.

Romans 8:34 – "Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."