

In Jesus' name. Amen.

People loved by God,

This is one of those legendary Bible stories that most people have heard about.

It's also one of those stories that baffles Christians: How could the Israelites fall SO hard SO fast?

But it shouldn't baffle us. It's just human nature.

But the Lord didn't record this for us so that we would be stupefied by them... or mock them.

Nor was the main purpose of His recording it for us so that we wouldn't do like-wise (though we should also learn that).

But the main purpose was so that we would see, once again, that the Lord is serious about keeping His promises.

*...as follows in Jesus' name:*

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, **the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us.** As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. **And [Aaron] received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"** When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord." **And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.**

And the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to 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-necked people. Now therefore let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you."

**But Moses implored the Lord his God and said, "O Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people, whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did He bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your burning anger and relent from this disaster against Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.'** **And the Lord relented from the disaster that He had spoken of bringing on His people.** <sup>(ESV)</sup>

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen.* (John 17:17)

It didn't take long for Israel, did it.

A mere 40 days before, the Lord had appeared to them descending onto the mountain in fire and thick smoke.

Mt. Sinai shook and a trumpet sound grew louder and louder as Moses spoke to God.

And God thundered down His 10 Words Exodus 19:16-19 (what we call the 10 Commandments):

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

**YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS....**

**YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FOR YOURSELF A CARVED IMAGE ...**

**YOU SHALL NOT TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD YOUR GOD IN VAIN.**

And Israel had been so afraid they begged Moses to be a mediator, to go up to God on the mountain that Moses might receive the Law from the Lord on their behalf... so that they would not die.

If you had asked them at that time, how sure were they that anyone who transgressed those words would suffer the hot burning wrath of God, they all (to a man, woman and child) would have said yes. The people were so afraid that death was right around the corner for them.

And yet, 40 days later, they seem to have forgotten all of it, as they even ask for a god to be made.

...

Now, there is certainly no excusing them for what they did, but....

But if you think about the situation a little more, you may be able to see why:

Remember Moses had gone up the mountain 40 days before.

He didn't take any food with him. No water.

And God seemed pretty wrathful that day, didn't He?

So it would seem logical that "**they would not know what had happened to this Moses fellow.**"

So there they were... stranded in the wilderness, without the guy who led them out of Egypt.

But Moses had left Aaron in charge while he was gone, so they spoke to him.

Notice though that there is a difference between what they wanted and what Aaron said.

They said, "**make us gods who will go before us,**"

and "**These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.**"

But while Aaron totally caves and carves a calf out of gold,

still he tried to keep the people following the Lord, saying, "**Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.**"

But for whatever Aaron tried piously to do by directing their spirituality to the Lord, he utterly failed.

The celebration that he had made up was unauthorized and the sacrifices were a mockery.

And not only did he make the golden calf, but he misused the name of the Lord

by falsely claiming the graven image was the Lord.

But that's really what the devil likes to do, isn't it? ... Make a lie seem like a truth, for a good reason.

But the people really weren't convinced anyway, were they?

While Aaron tried to rein in the feast with seemingly pious sacrifices, a least within the bounds of 1 god, the people **ate and drank and rose up to play**... And they weren't playing Yahtzee.

Their play was more like what we heard St. Paul warning about in his epistle to Ephesians today: sexual immorality and impurity or covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, and crude joking.

While the Lord had made His covenant with them and named them His children,

and promised them great blessings and the Promised Land as their inheritance,

they acted more like **sons of disobedience**, returning to live in **darkness**, like in Egypt,

living like the God who thundered down saying, **I AM A JEALOUS GOD,**

**VISITING THE INIQUITIES OF THE FATHERS UPON THE CHILDREN...** Exodus 20

either didn't exist or wouldn't actually punish.

...

The same God who had promised so much blessing... also promised punishment for transgressors. Again, just like St. Paul warned, those who are **sexually immoral or impure, or who are covetous (that is an idolator), have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.**

These are not just the sins of a legendary Biblical story... or of the heathen community in Ephesus. These are the sins of our society, too, that even leach into the lives of the children of God/of light.

Our lives are so filled with marketing ploys that are designed to tempt you into discontentment, and lead you even into covetousness, **which is idolatry**, so that while not a golden calf, you crave, you worship, this or that toy/vacation/car/clothes/house or a certain lifestyle and are led to believe that these will make you happy and fulfill you. ...

And do not think lightly either of your inappropriate flirtations, your lingering looks, or your improper relationships, nor be unconcerned about filling your eyes, ears, and thoughts with what sometimes passes for entertainment, but is just a sin on public display.

These are the things that St. Paul appropriately exhorts are **out of place**, and **not proper among the saints.**

...

And yet here we are, only 17 days away from Ash Wednesday when we repented of these sins w/ ashes, and desired to amend our sinful lives, and only 8 days away since we did it last Sunday, and only 25 minutes away from when we repented of it this morning.

And lest we think lightly of our sin, or mistakenly think that God thinks lightly of it, consider also, the warning from Jesus' teaching about the demons being cast out:

there is no such thing as neutrality in spiritual matters; either you are God's or you are the devil's; you can't be both.

**Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters.** <sup>Luke 11</sup>

That scattering is one of judgment and condemnation - the wrath that burns hot, even for eternity.

...

Yet, just as seriously as God takes sin, so He also takes His forgiveness and desire to save seriously.

Note how the Lord told Moses about Israel's idolatry and told him His plan to wipe Israel out.

This was not because the Lord wanted Moses' advice or counsel.

It was to show Israel... and you... God's grace and mercy

and how He takes His own promises seriously

and how He listens and responds to His chosen mediator.

When the Lord told Moses what was happening in the camp, and what His "course of action" might be, Moses spoke up. He mediated on their behalf.

But notice that He never brought up anything attempting to speak about how good they were or why they deserved it.

Instead, He laid it all at God's feet and used His own promises against Him, as it were:

**O Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people, whom You have brought out ...**

**Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did He bring them out, to kill them ... and to consume them ...'?**

**Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self...**

The Lord could not back down from His Word, and so **relented of the disaster He had spoken of.**

As good a mediator as Moses was, and as humble a man as he was to care for such a stiff-necked people,

He is not the Savior... not of Israel, not us, not of the world.  
St. Paul doesn't point our attention to Moses or the Law for our salvation from our idolatries/adulteries.  
As we see from the golden calf incident, fear of condemnation does not cause obedience to the Law.  
Instead, St. Paul and Moses point us to Jesus Christ, who **loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God – the only one that would be accepted.**  
The golden calf could do nothing for Israel's redemption.  
And neither does gold or silver (or toys/vacations/cars/cloths/ or a certain lifestyle).  
Instead, the Lord has spent the most precious element in this world's creation,  
the holy and divine blood of Jesus Christ for you and for your salvation.  
Your covetousness, your idolatry, for your adulteries of mind, tongue and body  
have been fully and completely paid for since He has borne them on the cross.  
And in their place, He has just as freely given to you His **fruit of light, all that is good and right and true.**

Jesus is the stronger one than the devil who came into our world to attack and overcome the strong man.  
and to gather you, the spoil, back from the devil for Christ's own kingdom.  
He has claimed you as the child of God by washing you in His blood in your baptism.  
There He made you an heir of the heavenly Promised Land, not by your works of obedience,  
but by His work of redemption.

And when you doubt the seriousness of the Lord, whether to punish or to forgive,  
consider the cross that hangs before you.  
The image is not that of a golden calf, but of a human body.  
It is not an idol that is worshipped, but a point of reference and focus...  
that you may see, in the same image the serious wrath of God's head anger meted out,  
and the serious love of God spent for you and for your salvation.

Thanks be to God.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

*Soli Deo Gloria*