

Exodus 32:15-35

“Coming down the mountain (part b)”

Outline:

I.) Intro.

II.) Vs. 15-29 Standing on the Word or dancing before a bull

III.) Vs. 30-35 My life for theirs

Intro.

Right up there with the mystery of God using people to share the truth of who He is to a world that so desperately needs to know Him, is the patience He has with us. I don't know about you but people try my patience! The trouble with us people is that we act like, people! I marvel at the Lord's grace in spite of me. This chapter began with a description of Israel's activities while Moses was up on the Mountain with the Lord. We saw that the people demanded that Aaron fashion a god to their liking. In Deuteronomy just before the nation enters the land of promises some forty years later after a whole generation dies in the wilderness, Moses again gathers the nation together as he goes over the law and why they failed. It is interesting to read the 9th chapter as Moses retells the events (verses 8-21). Clearly Moses wanted them to know that it was not, *“Because of their righteousness that the LORD had brought them in to the land”*. Further more Moses says, *“understand that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people.”* He then goes on to retell the events of this chapter. When you compare the two passages you will realize that though they tell the same details they do so in two different orders. Which leads me to believe that, one is topical and the other one chronological. In Deut. the tablets are smashed then Moses intercedes for Israel, then again for Aaron, lastly Moses destroys the idol and goes back up the mountain to

intercede for another 40 days and nights. Logically it would appear that the Deut. passage is chronological and the Exodus passage is more dealing with topics.

- A. Verses 15-20 Moses deals with the nation.
- B. Verses 21-24 he deals with Aaron his brother.
- C. Verses 25-29 the Levites come forward.
- D. Verses 30-35 Moses intercedes for the nation.

It would appear to me that Moses in giving this story in Exodus topically, painting a picture for all to see and not just retelling a story. Last week we saw a nation who had personally experienced the presence of God rebel. We saw how an angry mob turned a leader into a lying politician. This chapter reveals how will God deal with them and how He will use Moses to turn them back towards the Lord.

II.) Vs. 15-29 Standing on the Word or dancing before a bull

Vs. 15-18 Here we see what Moses did.

- 1.) Vs. 15 **He turned and went down the Mountain**: Now don't laugh, that was a big step of faith. God has just told him that the nation as turned their backs on Him and it's a real mess down the hill. The first thing we see Moses do is **take responsibility**, it's his problem, not just theirs.
- 2.) Vs. 15 **He took the Word of God as his standard**: Moses did not go down the hill alone, he took the word of God with him. Moses knew that whatever the problem was the Word was the answer.
- 3.) Vs. 16 **He trusted in the work of God**: He recognized that just as the Word of God was God's work so also was the changing of the nation. Look at how Moses focuses in how the details of the tablets by saying, "*the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God.*" **No matter what he faced God was still in control.**

Vs. 17-18 Remember now that Moses was not a good speaker; further more we are told that he was the meekest man on the earth. Joshua had gone with Moses but had not gone all the way up the hill. So when Moses comes to where Joshua had been camped Joshua can hear the noise of the over 2 million people and thinks it's the Amalekites warring against the Israelites. The people were making so much noise that you can not hear what the person sitting next to you was saying even if they are yelling at the top of their lungs. This is what Joshua heard in the valley below.

Moses had already been told what was going on with the nation as he tells Joshua that it was the

sound of a party not a war. Although I'm not sure that Joshua was all that wrong with his assessment in saying that it was a war, for clearly there was a spiritual battle going on. There were several hundred thousand people complete out of control in their partying before a golden calf. It is into this scene that Moses comes. I'm impressed with Moses in the very fact that he confronts a rebellious nation of two million with only two stone tablets and Joshua.

- A. Vs. 19 **He draws near and saw**: He cared enough to get close even to the ugliness of their sin. There are a lot of Christians who would prefer to sit a good distance away from the ugliness of a sinful world and hurl insults at those that are in rebellion to God's word. But that is not what Moses did. No, he drew near and saw for himself what they were doing. I kind of think that what Moses did was see what was going on enough to understand what was at the root of their actions.
- B. Vs. 19 **He got angry and showed why he was angry**: It never tells us that Moses was angry until he sees what they were doing for himself. It is only after this that Moses reactions matches that of the Lord's. What angered the Lord angered Moses. I think that we Christians are far to tolerant of sin, ours as well as others. I think that sin ought to anger us, I'm not saying that we should hate sinners, but we must hate sin, because it destroys in human lives.
- a.) As Moses threw down the stone commandments we see that it destroys fellowship with the living God. I hate the fact that sin has destroyed people for all eternity. In Deut. 9:17 Moses tells us that he, "*took the two tablets and threw them out of my two hands and broke them **before your eyes.***" Moses confronted the nation with both their sin as well as the consequences of their sin. You will recall that the covenant contained all that was necessary for the people to receive all the blessings of a relationship with the Lord. But all those promises were contingent upon them being obedient to the commandments. All that governed their well being was just shattered before their eyes. It would be like the president before all the nation taking up the constitution and the bill of rights and tore them up. By doing that act he would be declaring that all the rights and laws that ensure everyone the opportunity to pursue life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness was now null and void. Moses says this is the effect of what you have done, you rejected God and He has rejected you in the state you are now in.
- C. Vs. 20 **He took the bull by the horns**: Moses takes the golden calf and turns it into veal hamburger. They had been partying to their golden calf, no doubt drinking toasts to him, now they were literally drinking him. Here is the second reason why we should be angry at sin: It separates fellowship between people. The people were divided from each other. Sin always has that effect on others it divides. Moses ground up the golden calf for three reasons:

- I.) To show them the futility of worshipping something that could be destroyed so easily.
- II.) To completely get rid of the idol. Moses ground it up as he tells us in Deut. *“it very small, until it was as fine as dust.”*
- III.) To make them have immediate consequences for their rebellion. To much of the time we don’t have immediate consequences for our sin these folks did.

D. Vs. 21 **He address the lack of leadership**: Moses recognizes that thought the plan to do this did originate with his brother Aaron, he allowed it to take place and took the lead in it’s making. Moses rebuked Aaron to his face, but just like the Israelites we are told that though, *“the LORD was very angry with Aaron and would have destroyed him; Moses prayed for him.”* Anger at the sin, calling it what it is yet at the same time compassion for the sinner!

Vs. 22-24 Aaron’s offers three excuses that are very familiar to all of us:

- a.) Vs. 22 *“Do not let the anger of my lord become hot”*: Calm down **it’s not as bad as you think!** Moses had just called it a “so great a sin”, and Aaron’s first response back is, *“It’s not as bad as you are making it out to be!”* When we blow it we always seek to minimize our sin, don’t we?
- b.) Vs. 22-23 *“You know the people, that they are set on evil”*: **It’s their fault, boys will be boys,** Moses! Aaron is using the sins of other to cover his own sin. *“Hey, you think what I did was bad, why I’m far better them most!”* And to a point Aaron is right but the problem is Aaron used the sin of others as an opportunity to sin him self instead of standing up for what was right. This is always a bad argument because if you knew that they are bent towards evil why did you go along with them?
- c.) Vs. 24 *“I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out.”*: **It just happened,** Moses like a miracle! Aaron emphasized the sins of others while minimizing his own responsibility. We were already told on verse four that Aaron fashioned it with an engraving tool and now he lies and says that it was all just an accident.

Vs. 25-29 These verse stand in stark contrasts to Aaron feeble excuses. First off Moses places the responsibility squarely on the leadership. These guys had not been restrained at all by Aaron and what Moses saw was a orgy of sorts all centered around the worship of an idol. Buried in this verse is something real interesting. You see we often don’t think that our sins have any lasting consequences. Neither do we think that we ever have a problem with a particular sin. Notice verse 25 Moses says that, *“Aaron had not restrained them, **to their shame among their enemies.**”* I’m not sure when Moses sat down to write Exodus but clearly he saw the correlation between what took place here and what the enemy would use later in their lives to cause them to

stumble. In Numbers 25 which was only a few years later as Israel was still wondering in the wilderness we are told that, *“the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.”* It’s clear that Israel’s enemies were watching what took place here. The King of the Moabites realized that Israel was powerful so he hired Balaam to curse the nation. The problem was that every time Balaam started to pronounce a curse a blessing came out. Finally, we are told in Num. 31:15-16 that *“these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD.”* This incident here in Exodus is where Balaam got his idea.

Vs. 26-29 Unlike Aaron Moses draws a line in the sand by his standing on the Word of God. We are not told who other than the Levites came with Moses but no doubt some did. But there were many that sided against the Lord as well. Moses and Aaron were from the tribe of Levi, so these people came over. To many this seems a bit harsh as 3000 were killed by the Levites. But these were the ones who were no doubt the most riotous and were endangering the lives of all by their actions. They not only did not side with Moses or repent, they were still actively pursuing evil. Picture a riot where the police and authorities try to stop the crowd and instead they just become more violent that was the case here. One last word here about Aaron as he watched what happened to 3000 men because he simply refused to restrain the people. I’ve tried to put myself into Aaron’s shoes. I use to think that Aaron got off rather lightly as he clearly had a large part in this whole sinful action of the nation, but you know what I think if I was Aaron I would have rather of died than to live with what I had done. As a Pastor I have made many mistakes and some of them have caused people to not walk with the Lord, I have to live with that every day. Sin has consequences to others!

III.) Vs. 30-35 My life for theirs

Vs. 30 Moses tells the folks that what they had done may have lasting effects. No where does he ever minimize the seriousness of their sin, but he does emphasize the truth that God is able to forgive. I find the balance of these two truths very difficult in life. We are totally depraved and we must never underestimate our sin. We ought to always take our failures and sins seriously, but at the same time we have a great Lord who reminds us in 1 John 1:9 *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

Vs. 31 I get the feeling here that Moses is more aware of their sin than they are. As Moses again intercedes for the people he is overwhelmed with what they have done against so great a God. I get the feeling that like all parents who learn of the bad behavior of their child that Moses is broken hearted. Oh that we too would be broken hearted over the sins of other enough to intercede for them.

Vs. 32 Moses is more than just broken hearted he comes to the Lord as the only basis of hope. Only the Lord can forgive. Did you notice that little dash after the word sin in verse 32 right before the words, “But if not?” Well that is placed there to indicate that Moses paused for some time after he said, *“Yet now, if You will forgive their sin-”* Moses waited upon the Lord for a response and none came forward as far as forgiveness. It is then that Moses went on to say, *“if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.”* We are not sure what “book” this is. It could be that this is the book of life that is mentioned in scripture that records the names of all those that will be in heaven. Or it could be that it is the book of the living meaning that if God was going to wipe out all of the Israelites as they deserved then Moses wanted to be taken as well. At any rate Moses clearly has identified with the people. Moses was willing to die for the people or at very least die with the people!

Vs. 33 God's answer is that each will live and die based upon their own actions. Now as good as Moses heart was he was not the right person to make that statement, there would come another who could make that statement and do more then that. For He would be the Lamb of God that would take away the sins of the world! As Caiaphas, the high priest would say about the death of Jesus, *"it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish."*

Vs. 34-35 God forgave the nation as a whole but those that did not repent would be judged. God would not reject the nation as His "Angel" shall go before them. The Lord is faithful even when we are not. We are not told what or when this plague took place. Neither are we ever told that any died of this plague, but clearly the nation understood what would happen to them if they forsook God. Yet, they would do it again, just like us!