

Calling us Out to Call us in

[A Golden Calf or a Gracious God – Exodus 32]

We find imbedded within the narrative of Exodus, the Lord God calling His people out of bondage into His presence, a momentary, yet paradigmatic, episode of **rebellion**.

At the foot of Mount Sinai, following the giving of the Decalogue and the instructions for the tabernacle, the chosen community of Yahweh fails to worship the true God and instead **exchange** truth for an **invention** of their frail hands. The golden calf episode forces us to ask deep spiritual questions of ourselves: where are we weak, where are we tempted, where are we allergic, and how can I pursue Christ?

May we open our hearts to the living Word of Truth that is a light to our path and a lamp to our feet. This is the glorious truth of Christ to us today!

Today, we declare independence from sin through the blood of Jesus Christ. What is your pet sin, where is your pride, and where you do find safety and comfort? Oh that the mercy of Christ would invade our lives and deliver us.

A Golden Calf or a Gracious God? [Exodus 32:1-4]

What happens when God delays? (Exod. 32:1)

Ex. 32:1 When the people saw that Moses **delayed** in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who will go before us because this Moses, **the man** who brought us up from the land of Egypt—we don’t know what has happened to him!”

Often, as we see with Israel, our perception of **God’s delay leads to our impatience**. Impatience lay at the root of this sin of Israel. The text does not tell us how long Moses had been gone, but apparently it was long enough that the people were ready to believe that they would never see him again. Exodus 24:18 indicates for the reader that Moses ended up staying on the mountain for 40 days.

The propensity to not wait is a character trait that continues today in each and every one of us. We are confronted with the truth of Christ that His grace sustains us during our spiritual “delays.”

Here are our temptations during these moments of pause:

Impatience—the tendency to be impatient, irritable, or restless. Impatience waiting on the promises of God is a direct result of business. Business says “I have to keep busy, or do something.” **Impatience says:** God I don’t have time to wait. Impatience always leads to a lack of trust in the promises of Christ in our lives.

Impatience is a reliance upon self and not the sovereign Lord. *The world needs to see the community of Christ model patience.*

Trust- is the confidence placed upon a person (Lord). Spiritual “delays” in our lives often tempt us to **doubt** our confidence in the Lord’s faithfulness or plan. Oh that our confidence would be strengthened during the delays of God. Delays of doubt beg the question: “**God did I hear you right**” or “**can you do what you say you can do?**” May we rise up and be a people that “delay” builds our trust in the midst of a doubting world.

Go Ahead—we see Israel move forward rather than let God take the initiative. Have you ever tried to take spiritual initiative in your life? This is the “**try harder**” or “**run faster**” technique. **God’s timing is always perfect.**

AmTrack—I remember the last time we traveled on a train to New Orleans we were delayed for over an hour between BHM and Tuscaloosa. What the conductor knew, and what I was oblivious, was that a freight train was headed right for us. **To wait meant safety. To hurry meant destruction.** This is the same in your life. What if God’s delay is for your good?

Because God is good and Holy, his “delays’ are for your good.

There are moments in your life when God’s delay is your deliverance.

2 Pet 3:9 The Lord does not delay His promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.

God’s delays often afford us moments of rest, and patience.

2Pet. 3:14 Therefore, dear friends, while you wait for these things, make every effort to be found at peace with Him without spot or blemish. 15 Also, regard the patience of our Lord as an opportunity for salvation, just as our dear brother Paul has written to you according to the wisdom given to him.

Those who wait He will renew your strength.

What happens when God delays? Will you choose a golden calf or a gracious God?

Will you exchange grace? (Exod 32:2-4)

Israel, seeing the delay of Moses their leader from the mountain gathered around the second in command and wanted a solution. They were **longing for the presence** of the Lord and desired that Aaron make gods.

In light of the repeated references to **gold** in the tabernacle section, it is hard not to see the connection. By building the calf out of gold the people want what the tabernacle was intended to do – **provide a concrete point of contact** between the people and God (Enns).

The community fashioned the gold, presumably the precious metals part of the loot taken from Egypt (Exod. 12:36).

Not only did Israel use the gold from God's gracious deliverance in Egypt to mimic the tabernacle they fashioned an image of God that could not compare.

Although the Lord is often metaphorically associated with various animals (eagle Exod. 19:4), and lion (Hos 13:7), he is never associated with the bull in any explicit illicit shrines. The bull image, therefore, is **quintessentially pagan**, and it results in the cultic cry "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt" (Garrett).

Specifically, it was thought that calves or bulls functioned as **pedestals** for the gods seated or standing over them. In this sense the calf is analogous to the ark (Enns).

How often do we take the **daily graces** of God, the precious metals provided when we were delivered from bondage, our spiritual gifts, the freedom we have from sin, my time, my money, my worship, my mouth, my mind and use it for selfish reasons or selfish gain.

I have money in my office that is from around the world. I exchanged it in those countries. But that money is worthless in Moody. In God's economy the I cheapen his when I exchange God's gifts in my life for selfish gain.

We like Israel put other things on **pedestals** in our lives.

We too exalt ourselves to places of importance. And yet the Lord is drawing us back. May we not abuse his grace or exchange the glory of God for a poor image.

Today will you choose a Golden Calf or a Gracious God? Oh that we would be a people who lift high the banner of Christ and demolish the golden calves in our lives.

What sound am I making? (Exod. 32:16-18)

Moses and now Joshua, from the mountain, **hear a sound** (32:17) coming from the foot of the monument. And what they hear is a source of confusion. Joshua, a seasoned general, perceived what he thought was the familiar sound of war. Moses, also hearing the same volume said: it is not the sound of victory or defeat in war but he sound of singing. But why, or what were the people singing about?

We are reminded here in this narrative of **the power of sound**.

Power of Sounds

Non-branded and branded sounds:

1. Baby giggle
2. Intel
3. Vibrating phone

4. [ATM / cash register](#)
5. [National Geographic](#)
7. [T-Mobile Ringtone](#)
8. [McDonald's](#)
9. ['Star Spangled Banner'](#)
10. [State Farm](#)

Certain sounds stay with us for our entire lives.

Our lives daily give off the sounds of worship, celebration, joy, sadness, hurt, anguish, and triumph. Further, from the overflow of our hearts the mouth speak.

What sound is your life giving? We know that sound travels further than we think. The sound of rejoicing in the camp will always reach the mountain. Is your life a pleasing sound to the Lord? Is my life a glorious sound to those who need to hear conversations of grace seasoned with salt, or is my life echoing sounds of death, gossip, and selfishness?

What sound am I making to the ears of the Lord? Am I a squeaky wheel? Am I a complainer? Am I a rambler? Am u prone to talk about the weather and sports and church yet the grace of Jesus is far from my lips? Of is my life a beautiful symphony... We are all noisy.

Story about Butch from Moody Auto.

Singing is probably an allusion to the singing Israel did after the victory at sea (the same root ‘anah is used in this verse and in Exod 15:21). (Enns).

Will you choose to make noise to a Golden Calf or a Gracious God?

We have a mediator (Exod. 32:9-14)

Moses and now Joshua, from the mountain, hear a sound coming from the foot of the monument. And what Moses said that God should forgive Israel because he is merciful and because this is consistent with his larger purposes.

For us, forgiveness depends on God's completed program of humanity in Christ, and also upon his basic compassion and faithfulness. **We never seek forgiveness on the grounds of our worthiness** or importance, or on the grounds that our sins are excusable (Garrett).

By his fearless intercession, he saved Israel. Moses is a forerunner of Christ and a model for us (Garrett).

Moses essentially says: "Take me instead." (Enns).

Mediator

The good news of the gospel is that Exodus 32-32 does not apply to us today! It is not the nature of

God that has changed. **Rather, a Mediator has come**, by God's design, one "who had no sin to be sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21, Enns).

1Tim. 2:5 For there is one God
and one **mediator** between God and humanity,
Christ Jesus, Himself human,

This weekend we celebrate freedom as a country that was gained in 1776. But the greatest freedom anyone will experience is the freedom found in Jesus Christ our mediator.

My Response to the Gospel

The Lord calls us out (of bondage) to call us in (to his presence)

What is your golden calf moment? Are you guilty of being in the presence of the Lord (10 commands) and yet you sin? Know that the Lord stands ready to forgive. Maybe you often pray for deliverance in the morning and sin at evening. **Only Jesus Christ can break these chains**

What is your golden calf? Do you believe that you have committed a sin that can never be forgiven? Abortion, drug use, adultery, divorce, gossip, lust, youth – singles have you gone to far in a relationships physically, sent pictures you had no business sending? Have you spent time at the throne of God. The Lord will meet you at the mercy seat not at a judgment seat if you repent.

The reality is that everyone has chosen the golden calf. We have exchanged the truth of God for a lie.

Gospel: Creator—creations – fall short – our conscious – held accountable – Jesus lived a perfect life – died our death – to offer us eternal life and a restored relationship – died/rose/reigns – **calls and invites you into a new relationship into new life. Will you open the door or shut it?**

We have one who exchanges his life for ours (Exod. 32:30-35)

Ex. 32:31 So Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Oh, these people have committed a grave sin; they

have made a god of gold for themselves. ³² Now if You would only forgive their sin. But if not, please erase me from the book You have written.”

Have you responded? Will you choose a golden calf or the grace of Jesus Christ?



Notes

Ex. 32:1 When the people saw that Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who will go before us because this Moses, **the man** who brought us up from the land of Egypt—we don’t know what has happened to him!”

Impatience lay at the root of this sin of Israel’s (Cole).

The last thing they want is to be different, by their new relationship to God: yet this is God’s aim (Exod. 19:5-6) (Cole).

They rather than God, take the imitative (Fretheim).

The people are not seeking a substitute for an absent leader

The text does not tell us how long Moses had been gone, but apparently it was long enough that the people were ready to believe that they would never see him again (Garrett).

Exod 24:18 indicates for the reader that Moses ended up staying on the mountain for 40 days (NAC).

This fellow/man Moses

This phrase in Hebrew and English certainly communicates a sense of derision and contempt (Enns).

Ex. 32:2 Then Aaron replied to them, “Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters and bring them to me.” ³ So all the people took off the gold rings that were on their ears and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ He took the gold from their hands, fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made it into an image of a calf.

Then they said, “Israel, this is your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!”

Gold

Presumably the gold rings are part of the loot taken from Egypt in Exod 12:36 .

In light of the repeated references to gold in the tabernacle section, it is hard not to see the connection. By building the calf out of gold the people want what the tabernacle was intended to do – provide a concrete point of contact between the people and God (Enns).

Calf

Is not a good translation of ‘egel. A young bull in his first strength is meant: for instance the word can

describe a three year old animal (Cole).

It is important to see that the making of the calf, while from one perspective an act of gross apostasy and rebellion, was from another perspective an act driven by a need for reassurance and even by a misguided piety (Garrett).

Although the Lord is often metaphorically associated with various animals (eagle Exod. 19:4), and lion (Hos 13:7), he is never associated with the bull in any expect illicit shrines. The bull image, therefore, is quintessentially pagan, and it results in the cultic cry “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt” (Garrett).

The cry attributes the exodus to the bull-god and so robs YHWH of due honor. This, too, is always the outcome of idol worship (Garrett).

Specifically, it was thought that calves or bulld functioned as pedestals for the gods seated or standing over them. In this sense the calf is analogous to the ark (Enns).

Psa. 106:19 At Horeb they made a calf
and worshiped the cast metal image.

20 They exchanged their glory
for the image of a grass-eating ox.

21 They forgot God their Savior,
who did great things in Egypt,

Many today want “salvation without dedication.” We must be careful not to forget. Do not stop thanking God for his grace and living for His glory (Merida).

Ex. 32:5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; then he made an announcement: “There will be a festival to the LORD tomorrow.”⁶ Early the next morning they arose, offered burnt offerings, and presented fellowship offerings. The people sat down to eat and drink, then got up to play.

Ex. 32:7 The LORD spoke to Moses: “Go down at once! For your people you brought up from the land of Egypt have acted corruptly.⁸ They have quickly turned from the way I commanded them; they have made for themselves an image of a calf. They have bowed down to it, sacrificed to it, and said, ‘Israel, this is your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.’”⁹ The LORD also said to Moses: “I have seen this people, and they are indeed a stiff-necked people.¹⁰ Now leave Me alone, so that My anger can burn against them and I can destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.”

Stiff necked

This phrase, common in the Bible, is a farmers metaphor of an ox or a horse that will not respond to the rope when tugged (Cole).

In theory God could have destroyed Israel and still been faithful to his covenants. Israel had already violated

the Sinai covenant and so God was under no obligation to keep them as his people, and wiping out the nation of Israel would not of itself violate God's oath to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3).

Ex. 32:11 But Moses interceded with the LORD his God: "LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people You brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and a strong hand? **12** Why should the Egyptians say, 'He brought them out with an evil intent to kill them in the mountains and wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from Your great anger and relent concerning this disaster planned for Your people. **13** Remember Your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel—You swore to them by Your very self and declared, 'I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and will give your offspring all this land that I have promised, and they will inherit it forever.'" **14** So the LORD relented concerning the disaster He said He would bring on His people.

Relented

Another anthropomorphism. The meaning is not that God changed his mind but that He now embarked on a different course of action from that already suggested as a possibility, owing to some new factor which is usually mentioned in context (Cole).

Ex. 32:15 Then Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides—inscribed front and back. **16** The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was God's writing, engraved on the tablets.

Ex. 32:17 When Joshua heard the sound of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a sound of war in the camp."

Ex. 32:18 But Moses replied:

It's not the sound of a victory cry
and not the sound of a cry of defeat;
I hear the sound of singing!

Singing

The noise, possibly like ululation, was primarily a cultic celebration of their new god (Garrett).

Singing is probably an allusion to the singing Israel did after the victory at sea (the same root 'anah is used in this verse and in Exod 15:21). (Enns).

"Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell." -- CT Studd

Power of Sounds

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1. Baby giggle
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3. Vibrating phone
4. ATM / cash register
5. National Geographic
6. MTV
7. T-Mobile Ringtone
8. McDonald's
9. 'Star Spangled Banner'
10. State Farm

Ex. 32:19 As he approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses became enraged and threw the tablets out of his hands, smashing them at the base of the mountain. ²⁰ Then he took the calf they had made, burned it up, and ground it to powder. He scattered the powder over the surface of the water and forced the Israelites to drink the water.

While Moses was no doubt angry, one should not take the breaking of the tablets as a rash act, done quickly in fury and soon regretted. Rather, this was a symbolic statement that Israel had so thoroughly violated the covenant- in effect, before the ink on the contract was even dry – that they had rendered the covenant void (Garrett).

Ex. 32:21 Then Moses asked Aaron, “What did these people do to you that you have led them into such a grave sin?”

Ex. 32:22 “Don’t be enraged, my lord,” Aaron replied. “You yourself know that the people are intent on evil. ²³ They said to me, ‘Make us a god who will go before us because this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt—we don’t know what has happened to him!’ ²⁴ So I said to them, ‘Whoever has gold, take it off,’ and they gave it to me. When I threw it into the fire, **out came this calf!**”

This seems designed to claim the production of the idol as a miracle, as being the work of no human hand (Cole).

The people seek to create what God has already created (Fretheim).

Aaron has deliberately changed the story, concealing the fact that he fashioned the calf with a tool (Enns). There are two ways of looking at Aaron’s response. The answer is possible so lame that it serves no other purpose than to portray Aaron as a weasel and to expose the utter madness of the act (notice Moses does not dignify Aaron with an answer) (Enns).

Ex. 32:25 Moses saw that the people were out of control, for Aaron had let them get out of control, resulting in weakness before their enemies. ²⁶ And Moses stood at the camp's entrance and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me." And all the Levites gathered around him. ²⁷ He told them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says, 'Every man fasten his sword to his side; go back and forth through the camp from entrance to entrance, and each of you kill his brother, his friend, and his neighbor.'" ²⁸ The Levites did as Moses commanded, and about 3,000 men fell dead that day among the people. ²⁹ Afterward Moses said, "Today you have been dedicated to the LORD, since each man went against his son and his brother. Therefore you have brought a blessing on yourselves today."

Ex. 32:30 The following day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a grave sin. Now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I will be able to atone for your sin."

Ex. 32:31 So Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Oh, these people have committed a grave sin; they have made a god of gold for themselves. ³² Now if You would only forgive their sin. But if not, please erase me from the book You have written."

Moses said that God should forgive Israel because he is merciful and because this is consistent with his larger purposes. For us, forgiveness depends on God's completed program of humanity in Christ, and also upon his basic compassion and faithfulness. We never seek forgiveness on the grounds of our worthiness or importance, or on the grounds that our sins are excusable (Garrett).

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Ex. 32:33 The LORD replied to Moses: "I will erase whoever has sinned against Me from My book. ³⁴ Now go, lead the people to the place I told you about; see, My angel will go before you. But on the day I settle accounts, I will hold them accountable for their sin." ³⁵ And the LORD inflicted a plague on the people for what they did with the calf Aaron had made.

Illustrations

The odd thing was that before God closed in on me, I was in fact offered what now appears a moment of wholly free choice.... I became aware that I was holding something at bay, or shutting something out.... I felt myself being, there and then, given a free choice. I could open the door or keep it shut; I could unbuckle the armor or keep it on. Neither choice was presented as a duty; no threat or promise was attached to either, though I knew that to open the door or to take off the corslet meant the incalculable. Conversion of CS Lewis

Application

Rarely do people fall into apostasy or superstition simply because they have a perverse desire to defy God. Christians may similarly fill their homes or churches with icons out of a desire for a tangible sign of a spiritual presence. (Garrett).

It is difficult for anyone to hold the line at a little idolatry; it comes to dominate one's entire religious life (Garrett).

We must remember that Israel's sin at the foot of Mt Sinai occurs before there is any official means of sin atonement (Enns).