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Exodus: Delivered By God, For God / Judgment; Last Judgment; Christ / Exodus 32:15–29

This sermon confronts us with the piercing question, “Who is on the Lord’s side?” From the shattered tablets to the burning idol, Exodus 32 reveals both the gravity of sin and the necessity of decisive allegiance to God. Like Israel, we face a world of false worship and competing voices, yet Christ alone fulfilled the covenant we have broken and now calls us to repent and believe. One day He will return to separate sheep from goats. Neutrality will not stand. The question remains for each heart today: when that day comes, will you be found on the Lord’s side?

Introduction

Well to say the least, the last three weeks have been memorable. Two weeks ago I stood up here reflecting for a moment on the truth that a young man had violently had his life ended because of his beliefs, and today I am standing here with a heavy heart with the loss of our brother in Christ this week with the death of Voddie Baucham. Although I never had the opportunity to meet either one of these two men, I am struck that one thing that each of them had in common, more than anything else, was Christ and while my heart is heavy it is also filled with the hope. That hope is the same hope that these two men shared, the same hope that they both proclaimed, a hope that is only available through faith in Christ.

I am also encouraged by the example that they both set for boldness in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. These men are now fully healed, in the presence of the Lord, but for the rest of us, the call to boldly proclaim the gospel still stands.

In the recently released State of Theology Survey results from 2025 statement 21 was “There will be a time when Jesus Christ returns to judge all the people who have lived.” 62% of respondents agreed, either somewhat or strongly, with the statement while 16% disagreed. Among evangelicals that number soared to 97% either somewhat or strongly agreed (95/2) while only 2% disagreed. So the majority of those within the evangelical church, and for the sake of this study we would be included in

that, believe that there is a judgement day... of those same people, however, 28% agree that Jesus was not God, 53% believe that most people are good by nature, 43% disagree that even the smallest sin deserves eternal damnation, and 64% believe that everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God.

So, even though it would seem that most believe that there is a day when Christ will return to judge, there is little concern regarding that judgement. This is confirmed by the fact that 94% of responding evangelicals believe that God loves all people the same way. This is the belief that leads people to questions such as "how can a loving God send people to hell" or "if God is so loving how can bad things happen to good people, or how can He do this or not do that".

The truth of the matter is this, there is a day that is coming, one in which all will stand before Christ, it is described for us in Matthew's gospel in the 25th chapter verses 31-33; Matthew 25:31-33

Matthew 25:31–33 LSB

"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

"And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;

and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

the Apostles Creed records it "And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. The third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Over the last two weeks we have been looking at the events that began while Moses was on Mount Sinai with God receiving the tablets of the testimony. This morning we pick back up where we left off and we see what occurs when Moses descends from Sinai. Turn in your bibles once again to Exodus 32 as we look now at verses 15-29.

Text

Please stand for the reading of God's Holy, Inerrant, Infallible, Authoritative, Sufficient, Complete and Certain Word:

Exodus 32:15–29 LSB

Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain. And the two tablets of the testimony were in his hand, tablets which were written on both sides; they were written on one *side* and the other.

Now the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets.

Then Joshua heard the sound of the people as they shouted. And he said to Moses, "There is a sound of war in the camp."

But he said,

"It is not the sound of the cry of triumph,

Nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat;

But the sound of singing I hear."

Now it happened, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and *the* dancing; and Moses' anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.

Then he took the calf which they had made and burned *it* with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink *it*.

Then Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you, that you have brought *such* great sin upon them?"

And Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord burn; you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil.

"Indeed they said to me, 'Make gods for us who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'

"And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.' So they gave *it* to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf."

Now Moses saw that the people were out of control—for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies—

so Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, "Whoever is for Yahweh, *come* to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him.

And he said to them, "Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, 'Every man *among you* put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother and every man his friend and every man his neighbor.'"

So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day.

Then Moses said, "Be ordained today to Yahweh—for every man has been against his son and against his brother—in order that He may bestow a blessing upon you today."

Our most Holy and Heavenly Father, as we come now to the study of Your word, we simply ask that Your Spirit would guide us into all truth. That we would heed that which you teach us in Your word. We know that it is the very sustenance which we crave, that it testifies to us of Christ. We ask simply that we would cling to its truth, that we would obey its commands, that we would submit to You in every way. Father even now expose in us any sinful way, make it known to us that we may confess that sin before You, repent and find grace. Lord, we are thankful for Christ, thankful that because of His work on the cross of Calvary, because He defeated sin and death, because He rose victorious and because He now reigns on high that we may by grace through faith receive His righteousness and stand before You on His merit alone. Lord guide our thoughts, guard our hearts that we may glorify You in all things, all of this we ask in the precious name of Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Amen.

The Word of God

There is a question here in the midst of our text today that serves as the framework around which the rest of the text is draped. We will deal with the passage in the order in which it is delivered to us in the majority, but understand that this particular question is the same one on which everything within the text hinges. The question I am referring to is the one that Moses asks the people as he stands in the gate of the camp, “Who is on the Lord’s side?”

With that question being the hinge, it is fitting that the passage begins with a definitive statement regarding the Word of God. A few weeks ago we referred to verses 15-16 as we looked at the closing verse of chapter 31 and we talked about how these tablets of testimony were a perpetual symbol and reminder of God’s covenant with His people. They were the very commands of God, engraved by the very finger of God that the people of God had promised to obey as their portion of the covenantal agreement between themselves and God. The description within the passage makes it very clear that these tablets were unique, typically tablets engraved in this manner were only done on one side, these are engraved on both sides, but more importantly, that they were the work of none BUT God. Notice the first phrase of verse 6, “the tablets were the work of God”. Currid writes:

A Study Commentary on Exodus: Volume 2: Exodus 19–40 Moses Responds in Anger to the Hebrews (Exodus 32:15–20)

One ought to consider the main thrust of the description, which is to highlight the fact that the law inscribed on the tablets is the very Word of God; it is a series of divine imperatives that originate with Yahweh. The construction of the phrase, ‘And the tablets were the work of God,’ emphasizes that point. It literally reads, ‘And the tablets, they were the work of God.’ [...]—that is, the law on the tablets is the work of God alone

As Moses continues down the mountain we see that he is joined by Joshua and the two of them hear the sounds coming from the camp below. Sounds which Joshua mistakes for the sounds of battle, however, Moses having been told already by God what is happening discerns the sound for what it really is, sounds of singing. The structure of verse 18 is a parallelism that serves to highlight the contrasts between the first two lines and the third. It is almost as if Moses is teaching Joshua how to distinguish

between the sounds of battle, victory and defeat, and the sound of worship, even if it is false worship. As sound occurs in a valley the noise is amplified and somewhat distorted so that it can become difficult to distinguish between specific sounds. Moses, with the truth spoken by God ringing in his ear can tell the difference, he has better discernment, why, because his interaction and experience with God's word has sharpened his ability to discern truth. The same is true for us today, the more that we spend time in the presence of God through His word and in prayer the better our ability to discern the truth of the sounds that we encounter in the world, even the cacophony that exists for the purpose of distracting us from truth.

At the end of his life, the prophet Elijah, having been used by God to display His power and might in the destruction of the prophets of Baal runs from Jezebel and hides. We read these words in 1 Kings 19:9-12

1 Kings 19:9-12 LSB

Then he came there to a cave and lodged there; and behold, the word of Yahweh *came* to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

And he said, "I have been very zealous for Yahweh, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, pulled down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

So He said, "Go forth and stand on the mountain before Yahweh." And behold, Yahweh was passing by! And a great and strong wind was tearing up the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before Yahweh; *but* Yahweh *was* not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, *but* Yahweh *was* not in the earthquake.

Then after the earthquake a fire, *but* Yahweh *was* not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a thin gentle whisper.

In our world we have hundreds of thousands proclaiming "their" truth, spend time in the Word of God to cut through the distracting noise with discernment to hear God's truth, proclaimed by His people, according to His word.

Righteous Anger

As Moses reaches the people of Israel and sees for his own eyes what has happened he becomes enraged. Literally the text uses the same description for the anger of Moses as it had for the anger of God earlier, that it burned, and in that burning anger he casts the tablets down at the foot of the mountain, breaking them into pieces. There are two things here we need to deal with. First, let us look briefly at the anger of Moses. There are those who will tell you that anger in and of itself is a sin, but this is false. Scripture tells us in Psalm 4:4 "be angry but do not sin" Paul would later quote that verse in his letter to the church at Ephesus. If you will recall, one of the things that the church at Ephesus is noted for in Jesus letter to them in Revelation 2:2 "'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot bear with those who are evil, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;". Jesus, when he entered the temple became angered at the money changers, turned over the tables and chased them out with a whip because they had turned the house of God into a den of thieves. There is a time and a place for anger, not all anger, but righteous anger. In order for anger to be righteous there must be an occasion where there is willful disobedience to the commands of God.

Moses' anger burned, but look at what cause this burning anger, "the calf and the dancing". Now, before we go all baptist and say, see dancing is a sin, understand that this is not dancing in the sense that we would use it today. What caused Moses anger was the fact that the people had broken commands 1 and 2 - Exodus 20:3-5 "'You shall have no other gods before Me. "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,"

Moses was angry because of the sin that he saw in the lives of the people of God. I wonder how often we get angry at the sin we see in the world. How often do we speak up and speak out about the sin we see in the world... how often do we speak up and speak out about the sin we see in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ, in our spouses, in ourselves... The responsibility of the believer is to address our own sin as we are confronted with them, to address the sin we see in our brothers and sisters in Christ and then to address the sin in the world, because, as we will see,

there are only two types of people in this one race called humanity.

Secondly, let us look at the destruction of the tablets. Often times when this event is taught on it goes something along the lines of "Moses was so mad he threw down the tablets in sin and broke them" and often it is added that as a punishment God made him carve the next set himself, which is not what the text teaches. Moses does, later have to cut the tablets out of stone and bring them up to God for God to once again write on them, but that has its own purpose which we will address when we get to that text. Later, Moses describing these events in Deuteronomy 9:15-17 shows no remorse or regret. There we read these words: Deuteronomy 9:15-17

Deuteronomy 9:15–17 LSB

"So I turned and came down from the mountain while the mountain was burning with fire, and the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands.

"And I saw that you had indeed sinned against Yahweh your God. You had made for yourselves a molten calf; you had turned aside quickly from the way which Yahweh had commanded you.

"And I took hold of the two tablets and threw them from my hands and shattered them before your eyes.

The destruction of the tablets at the foot of the mountain is highly symbolic, both to them and to us. To them it served as a notice that the covenant had been broken. Imagine the sight for a moment, if you will. You are an Israelite, at the base of Sinai, in the midst of a party to end all parties, when all at once you maybe hear a loud roar and two stone tablets come hurtling down, strike the ground at your feet, and explode into pieces. Immediately you look up at the source and Moses is standing there, face still radiating the glory of God, Moses looking otherworldly, one of two things happens, you realize your sin and you are ashamed, embarrassed, repentant... or it means nothing to you except that the party is ended and you didn't want it to. To us, it should stand as a reminder that once you break one command, you have broken them all. One thing that is given status above God makes us guilty of the whole... the sides are clearly being drawn.

Aaron Lies

After destroying the tablets, Moses proceeds to destroy the idol. The description of his actions are meant to demonstrate the thoroughness of the destruction. He did not merely melt down the gold into ingots for later use, or recycle it into jewelry, he utterly destroyed it. He burned it, ground it into powder and then scattered it onto the waters. Lest there be any part remaining that could be taken to be a god. The fact that this is done by the hand of man rather than the hand of God emphasizes that which Paul wrote to the Romans "choosing to worship and serve the created rather than the Creator." Their god was nothing more than a construct of human hands, a construct that was as easily destroyed as it was fabricated. After Moses scattered the gold upon the water he made the people drink. This is a passage that has caused much discussion without any truly clear, certain answers as to the purpose it served. Some have suggested it increase their shame, others have given additional explanations. The only thing that comes close to this in scripture is found in Numbers 5:11-31 and is part of the instructions regarding dealing with a woman suspected of unfaithfulness. The woman was given a test, part of which included drinking water that was contaminated with the dust from the floor of the temple. If there was a certain reaction, it proved her guilt, if not she was seen as empty. The idea would be as Cassuato put forth "the reaction of the people who drank would indicate guilt or not." Again there is no certainty here but some have suggested that this was the method of identifying the approximately 3,000 that were killed as a result of their sin.

Moses then turns to Aaron, the person entrusted with the care of the people in the absence of Moses, and calls him to account with the words of verse 21 - Exodus 32:21 "Then Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you, that you have brought such great sin upon them?"" Moses is very familiar with these people, he has seen first hand the way that they can get when they want something to happen but more importantly than seeking to find out what the people did to cause this, Moses wants to hear from Aaron why he gave in, why he failed as the leader, and brought this great sin upon the people. Aaron, just like Adam, bore the ultimate responsibility, he did not stand up and stand firm on the commands of God, reminding the people, that it truly did not matter what had happened to Moses, it was God that they serve. Instead, Aaron's response points

fingers at both the people themselves and at Moses.

The comment that he made first regarding the people, in an effort to shift blame, which again has been happening since Adam, was to try and calm Moses anger by saying to him, look you know these people, are you surprised, after all they are inclined to evil. The literal translation of the words "prone to evil" are "in evil". The word that is used is an adjective to describe a quality of the people themselves, it demonstrates a moral deficiency. It is the very definition of totally incapable, once again setting the tone for the biblical doctrine of total inability. Aaron's response to Moses was to first blame it on the nature of the people themselves that they couldn't keep the commands. While this is true, it does not eliminate the personal responsibility of keeping the commands, of diligently seeking to be obedient to God's commands.

Secondly, Aaron then shifts the blame to Moses and saying that the calf did not represent God, but rather Moses that went before them and so it was Moses' fault for having been on the mountain for so long. The issue here is that the people should know that they do not follow Moses, but Yahweh. I want you to hear this loud and clear, it is God whom we follow, not man. Every single one of us sitting here today has an appointment with physical death, unless Christ returns first. This is one of the issues with the modern day celebrity pastor mentality. God has set up the church to be served by under shepherds to guide and direct, but the head of the church is Christ and Christ alone!! First and foremost we follow Christ

The last thought on the issue with Aaron is the outright lie that he tells Moses, he makes it seem as though he threw the gold in the fire and out popped a calf, we know from our earlier studies that this is far from the truth.

The Hinge

Verse 25 is an interesting verse and I really appreciate the way that it is translated in the KJV where it reads:

King James Version Chapter 32

And when Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies:)

The meaning of the words are the same but the reason I like this translation better is because it should draw our attention back to the garden and the response of Adam and Eve when they ate the forbidden fruit: Genesis 3:7 "And the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings."

It is here, with the people standing naked and ashamed, before God and Moses that Moses asks the question on which everything hinges, "Whoever is for Yahweh, come to me!" a command that demands a response. Here we see the Levites respond and in their response Moses commands them to arm themselves and pass back and forth among the people, killing those who are responsible, regardless of if they are your brother/sister, friend or kinsman. The line of loyalty is challenged. Jesus says in Luke's gospel: Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." There is a line that is drawn, one that cannot be straddled. We hear these words of Jesus and we are shaken because we hear the word hate and we think, 'how could a loving God expect me to hate my brother, sister, father, mother, or my self?', especially since we live in a world that spends so much time and energy to show us that we are ok, that we are enough, that we should love ourselves. The message here is that it is Christ first and all other things last. Christ gave all for us, but how many of us are willing to give all for Him. How many of us are willing to sacrifice every earthly thing that we hold dear for the sake of Christ. How many will lay aside their creaturely comforts, for His sake. Which of you, if called would be like Isaiah and cry out "here am I, send me". If the call goes out from one standing in the gate, "Whoever is for Yahweh, come to me!" will you respond?

At the end of time, there is coming a day when Christ will judge the living and the dead, just as Moses passed judgement on those who were not on the side of Yahweh. Notice quickly verse 29: Exodus 32:29 "Then Moses said, "Be ordained today to Yahweh—for every man has been against his son and against his brother—in order that He may bestow a blessing upon you today."" We have dealt with that word ordained previously when we studied through the tabernacle, recall, it has to do with the work of God filling the hand of the people of God. His second call here, "be ordained today to Yahweh" is the gospel cry. It is the question of where is your faith,

is it in Christ, or the world. Do you serve Yahweh, or the world? Are you His or are you the world's? See we want to have our cake and eat it too, and nowhere more so than the church. We want to proclaim Christ while holding on to the world.

Conclusion

As we come to the close of this weighty passage, the question that rang out from the gate of the camp still echoes across the centuries: **“Who is on the Lord’s side?”** The Israelites stood exposed—literally and spiritually—before the holiness of God. Their golden calf was not merely a statue of metal; it was the visible proof of hearts that had exchanged the glory of the Creator for the work of their own hands. The shattered tablets at the foot of Sinai testified that the covenant had been broken. Moses’ righteous anger, the destruction of the idol, and the call to choose sides were not acts of impulsive violence, but visible reminders that God alone is worthy of our allegiance and that sin carries a deadly cost.

This scene is not confined to history. It is a mirror held before every soul. We live in a world filled with competing voices—each claiming to speak truth, each demanding loyalty. Like the Levites, every believer is called to step forward in open declaration that Christ is Lord, regardless of the cost. The line of separation is drawn not by family ties, cultural comfort, or personal preference, but by faith in Jesus Christ, the only One who fulfilled the law we have all shattered.

The same Christ who will one day sit upon His glorious throne has already offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice. He bore the judgment that our idolatry deserves and now calls all people everywhere to repent and believe. On that coming day, there will be no neutral ground. Every knee will bow—some in joyful worship, others in trembling acknowledgment of the King they rejected.

So the question remains: **when the call is sounded, when the King returns to separate sheep from goats, when the world tempts you to stay in the camp of compromise—will you be found on the Lord’s side?**

Closing Prayer

Gracious and Holy Father,

We come before You humbled by the truth of Your Word. We confess that like Israel we are prone to wander, quick to exchange Your glory for the empty idols of our own making. Forgive us, O Lord, for hearts that drift and minds that grow dull to Your majesty. Thank You for the righteous anger that reveals the seriousness of our sin, and thank You even more for the mercy that calls sinners to repentance through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Strengthen us by Your Spirit to discern truth in a world of noise. Give us courage to stand boldly for Christ, even when it costs us relationships, comfort, or reputation. Teach us to hate sin without hatred of people, to love righteousness more than ease, and to long for the day when our Savior returns in glory.

Seal in us the resolve of the Levites who stepped forward at Moses' call. May our lives proclaim with clarity and conviction that we belong to the Lord, and may we be found faithful when the Son of Man comes to judge the living and the dead. We pray this in the matchless name of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and King.

Amen.