

What If We Falter?
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- We ALL MESS UP!
 - That's the BAD NEWS
 - Even as Believers in Christ...we still SLIP and SIN
 - The GOOD news is that God is MERCIFUL, GRACIOUS, and LONGSUFFERING
 - The BEST NEWS is that through His Son Jesus Christ, He's made a way for us to be forgiven when we FALTER
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- The Children of Israel MESSED up as we'll see in Exodus chapter 32.
 - They MESSEDUP
 - Moses STOOD UP
 - And God HELD UP
 - And there are some lessons for us to learn in this scripture that apply to our own lives.

To set the stage, you'll recall that God has just given Moses and the people the TEN COMMANDMENTS and Moses is on Mt. Sinai with God being given more direction on how to lead God's people. Meanwhile, at the foot of the mountain, "the natives are getting restless."

Exodus 32:1-5

1 When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods [a] who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

2 Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." 3 So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. 4 He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, [b] O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."

5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD." 6 So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. [c] Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

- They MESSED UP!
- Scarcely thirty days ago God had given them the TEN COMMANDMENTS and they've already violated numbers 1 and 2...do you remember what 1 and 2 are?

Exodus 20:3-5

3 "You shall **have no other gods before me.**

4 "You shall **not make for yourself an idol** in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God...

- Let's be clear about what they did...not only did they **MAKE an IDOL** and **BOW DOWN** to it...the scripture says they engaged in **REVELRY**
- This was no church picnic; these weren't softball games and sack races
- What kind of **REVELRY** did they do before this **GOLDEN CALF**?
- It was an **ORGY**...the text suggests sexual immorality
- Not only did the Children of Israel **MESS UP**; Aaron who Moses left in charge **LED THEM** in **MESSING UP**.
- Verse 1 of Chapter 32: What caused them to even think of creating an idol to worship?
 - Moses had been gone a long time
 - They became afraid that he wasn't coming back
 - Let's face it, Moses was 80 years old and there was fire and smoke on top of the mountain and he had been gone for more than a month
- However, what had God displayed to them so far in this journey?
 - That He was **POWERFUL** demonstrated by great **MIRACLES** and that He was **FAITHFUL** and had met **EVERY NEED** they had
- I would contend that the Children of Israel weren't just bowing down before a **GOLDEN CALF**...they were worshipping at the food of "a **THREE 'I'**ed' Monster"...and the **THREE 'I's'** are:
 - Impatience
 - Impulsiveness
 - And Iniquity

IMPATIENCE with God leads to **IMPULSIVE DECISIONS** that lead to **INIQUITY AGAINST** God.

- Now let's apply this to you and me today.
- You and I would likely say, "I'd never melt down gold and make an idol to worship!"
- But, like the Children of Israel, are there times in our lives when we get **IMPATIENT** with God?
- Think about what this boils down to:
 - Moses has been gone a long time
 - The Israelites are scared
 - So they convince Aaron to do this horrible thing
 - Question: What were they basically saying to God when they did this?

The essence of **SIN** against God comes down to this statement:

"God, I don't **TRUST** you to take care of me, so I'm taking matters into my own hands."

- Doesn't that apply to any and every sin?

- Pick one and think about it:
 - God, I don't trust you to meet my needs so I stole that money.
 - God, I'm not satisfied with the spouse you gave me so I went looking for someone else.
 - God, I'm not certain you can be trusted with my well being so instead of praying I spend all my time worrying and fretting.
 - God, I can't afford to risk you having a plan for my life so I'm going to manipulate the circumstances to create MY PLAN and ask you to bless it.
 - And on and on it goes.

Another statement:

When we forget what God HAS done for us, and start to IMAGINE what He might NOT do for us...we're in the zone of temptation to sin

The essence of SIN against God is "I don't TRUST you to take care of me, so I'm taking matters into my own hands."

Impatience with God, leads to Impulsive Decisions, and Iniquity Against God.

Meanwhile up on the mountain:

Exodus 32:7-9

7 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. 8 They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'

9 "I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. 10 Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

- Not to be irreverent but, God was "ticked off"
- Moses, I've had it with these "stiff necked" Israelites.
- I'm just gonna burn 'em all up in a big fireball and start over with you and your family
- What did Moses do?
- They MESSED UP but Moses STOOD UP
- As the ultimate model of a leader, Moses, risking his own skin said...with all due respect Lord:
 - If you do this the Egyptians will just say "see there...their God took 'em out to the desert and fried the whole lot of them."
 - Please turn from your anger
 - Please remember the covenant you made

- And verse 14 is a remarkable verse. It says in the NIV “Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.” But the KJV says: 14And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.
- You don’t hear THAT WORD used about God very often...God REPENTED...not because He did anything wrong...the word means He changed His mind.

The Life Application Study Bible says:

God changed His behavior to remain consistent with his nature. When God first wanted to destroy the people, he was acting consistently with his justice. When Moses interceded for the people, God relented in order to act consistently with his mercy.

R.C. Sproul writes:

God is not talked into "changing His mind." Out of His gracious heart He only does what He has promised to do all along - not punish sinners who repent and turn from their evil ways. He chooses not to do what He has every right to do. The point of these narratives is to encourage us to pray. We are to make intercession. When we repent, then God removes the threat of punishment. The question is, Who is ultimately repenting here? God never repents in the sense that He turns away from sin or from error.

- Can a dedicated, committed, sincere servant of God make a case to the Father and cause Him to alter the punishment we deserve? Moses did.

C.H. Spurgeon wrote:

It is noteworthy that Moses did not lose himself in this moment of trial. We read at once, “And Moses besought Jehovah his God.” He was undoubtedly a man of prayer, but he must have been continually in the spirit of prayer, or else I could conceive of him, at that moment, falling on his face, and lying there in silent horror. I could imagine him flying down the mountain in a passionate haste to see what the people had done; but it is delightful to find that he did neither of these two things, but that he began to pray. Oh, friends, if we habitually pray, we shall know how to pray when praying times become more pressing than usual!

- Moses didn’t make excuses for the people...but he STOOD UP to INTERCEDE on their behalf.
- They MESSED UP; Moses STOOD UP in INTERCESSION; and God HELD UP both His wrath...and His COVENANT.
- So Moses went down the mountain
- And when he got there and saw this spectacle of debauchery and idolatry, verse 19 says HIS ANGER BURNED
- And also in verse 19 what does it say Moses did?
 - He threw the tablets of stone to the ground and broke them to pieces
 - This was not a “tantrum” or a “fit” ...what was he demonstrating to the people?
 - This is what you’ve just done with the commandments God JUST gave us?

- You've smashed the whole thing into pieces before I could even get back down the mountain with it!
 - Imagine the shock and dismay if this morning in the pulpit Pastor Johnny took a Bible and began destroying it saying, if you're not going to follow the commands in these pages we might as well tear this book to shreds.
- Then what did Moses do with the golden calf? Do you remember? Did you read ahead?
 - Ground it into powder; put the powder in the stream; & made them drink it.
- Then in verse 21 he turned to Aaron.
- Can you imagine the scene? The look on Moses' face and the look on Aaron's face when Moses turned to Aaron and said: "What WERE YOU THINKING?"
- And though this story is very sad and disturbing, God allows us a little comedy relief in verse 24.
- After Aaron blames it all on the people his best defense is "Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" (That's a direct quote from the NIV by the way)
- Talk about a lame excuse!
- Here's a point about confessing sin.
- When we become believers in Christ what do we exchange?
 - Our sin...for what? His righteousness.
- Have you ever gone to the store and tried to exchange something you didn't own?
- You can't exchange what you don't own.
- To repent of sin, YOU AND I HAVE TO OWN IT!
- Things got worse before they got better
- Moses called out to the people in verse 26: "Whoever is for the Lord come to me."
- And only the Levites who served God in the tent of meeting came forward
- And He said God has commanded, strap on a sword and go through the camp and whoever is responsible for this wicked thing...kill 'em.
- And three thousand died.
- By the way, why wasn't Aaron killed? He made the calf?

John MacArthur writes:

If you read Deuteronomy, chapter 9, verse 20, it says, "God spared his life because Moses prayed for him." And on that occasion, Moses interceded for him. And it was the intercession of Moses, and the grace of God in response to that intercession that spared the life of Aaron...although God may always have the right to take the life of a sinner, He may, in His grace, choose not to exercise that right, true? Are we not all living proof that God does not always exercise His right to kill the sinner. So, in the case of Aaron, He chose not to for His own holy purposes.

- And that brings us to verses 30 – 34:

Exodus 32:30-34

30 The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin."

31 So Moses went back to the LORD and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. 32 But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written."

33 The LORD replied to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. 34 Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin."

New International Version (NIV)

- Verse 31: Again, Moses makes no excuses for the people
- But he begs for their atonement...for the forgiveness of their sin
- Even if it meant HE would be blotted out of God's book
- He was willing to sacrifice HIMSELF to obtain forgiveness for the people
- But God said every person must bear their own sin...Moses, you aren't guilty...you can't repent for them...they have to repent for themselves
- Moses couldn't atone for HIS OWN sins much less the sins of the people

- Even when God forgives our sins...there are still CONSEQUENCES
- Not only were three thousand killed for what they had done...
- In verse 35; one final blow in this episode...God struck the people with a plague because of what they had done with the golden calf Aaron had made.

The bad news: The people MESSED UP and you and I MESS UP

The good news: Moses STOOD UP in intercession and God didn't destroy them

But now, the BEST news

Exodus 34:6-9

6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

8 Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. 9 "O Lord, if I have found favor in your eyes," he said, "then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance."

New International Version (NIV)

- In verse 6 God described His essential nature

- It's this nature that provides a way for you and me to be forgiven when we MESS UP
- God said of himself, that He is:
 - Compassionate – He takes pity on those lower than Him
 - Gracious – He gives us mercy we do not deserve
 - Slow to anger – He gives us countless opportunities to repent and turn to Him
 - Abounding in love – He loves us as the ULTIMATE Father
 - And in faithfulness – He can be trusted to be FAITHFUL in all the circumstances of our lives
- With a character and nature like that, it's no wonder God made a way for us to make it right when we mess up
- We all know that in Old Testament times, the people had to come to God through a high priest
- Moses is a "picture of Christ" when he advocated for the Israelites with God
- But Moses couldn't be the agent of atonement for their sins
- When Jesus died on the cross for our sins, HE became both our SACRIFICE and our ADVOCATE
- No longer do we need any human advocate, because we can go straight to the Father through the Son, Jesus Christ if we've accepted Him as Lord.

So What's the TAKEAWAY?

- Like the Children of Israel...we ALL MESS UP and sin
- We said earlier: The essence of SIN against God is "I don't TRUST you to take care of me, so I'm taking matters into my own hands."
- We also said: When we forget what God HAS done for us, and start to IMAGINE what He might NOT do for us...we're in the zone of temptation to sin
- We learned that Impatience with God, leads to Impulsive Decisions, and Iniquity Against God.
- BEFORE we sin, we need to watch for those feelings of IMPATIENCE with God's plan and fear that we can't TRUST Him.
- When they arise...REJECT them on the spot.
- When we DO SIN...we need to OWN IT so we can EXCHANGE it thanks to the saving work of Jesus.
- We can ALL be THANKFUL that God is COMPASSIONATE and GRACIOUS, loving us even though we FALTER and FORGIVING US when we REPENT.