

- I. My story.
  - a. I've been gone on vacation, and just recently returned. When you get back from vacation, you usually get the question, "How was your vacation?" Now, I have to tell you, my recent vacation was awesome...like over the top, awesome. This isn't usually the case for me. My wife normally has to have a talk with me in the middle of vacation to relax, be more present, and have fun.
  - b. Not this vacation, this vacation was awesome. The highlight of the vacation was 3 days at Disneyland. Some of you are probably thinking, that sounds more like hell, than vacation.
  - c. Hear me out. My mom and her husband, gave the whole family an all expense paid trip to Disneyland...3 days at the park for close to 25 of us.
  - d. I've only been to Disneyland 3 times in my life, and the last time was in high school...its been awhile. My wife had been there once for 4 hours 20 years ago, and my kids had never been.
  - e. So we absolutely loved it. Every rollercoaster, every experience we could soak up. 25 of us roaming both parks. Dragging our little ones on what use to be Tower of Terror (now called Guardians of the Galaxy)...great times!
  - f. The only stress we really had was dealing with the crowds of people and not losing a child or an adult. We had 9 kids to keep track of, 8 of which were under the age of 10 (including 2 two year olds) and 15 adults (covering every decade, including grandpa George who is in his 70s).
  - g. So we came up with back-up plan after back-up plan incase someone disappeared. And for the most part, we only lost adults, not kids.
    - i. To everyone's surprise, it was the adults that kept disappearing.
    - ii. It's kind of stressful when someone disappears...you call their cell phone, they don't answer. You split up and look for them, and still can't find them. In some cases, we just hoped they'd find us. You start to get annoyed, and say let's just move on, they can eventually find us.
    - iii. I hate to admit it, but that was our move once or twice, if we couldn't find them, we just moved on and went on a ride.
    - iv. It was like, "Well we gave it our best effort, they've been gone for 15 minutes, and California Screamin' is calling our names...gotta go!"
- II. Question:
  - a. This was Israel's way of dealing with the person they lost while on their way to the promise land. They looked for and waited for 40 days or so, and couldn't find him, so they moved on.
  - b. Who'd did they lose? They lost Moses. Their leader. And they decided to move on without him.
- III. Text:
  - a. Open your Bible to Exodus 32. It is the second book of the Bible. Our story today is found in Exodus 32. I want to quickly give some context to what has already happened before Exodus 32 and to do that, we have to go back a ways.
    - i. Now for all of you that love Bible trivia, here is some information: The first 5 books of the Bible are called the Pentateuch...which means...wait for it...5 books or scrolls. The Pentateuch is really one big book, which can also be called the Torah (meaning Law).
    - ii. Moses wrote the Pentateuch.
      1. The 5 books are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.
      2. We can't understand Exodus 32 without first understanding what has led up to it.
    - iii. In Genesis we know God created everything, mankind rejected Him, and God continues to look for anyone on earth who He can bless. God is looking for someone to be His people, and He will be their God.
      1. He finds such a person in Abram, who will later would be renamed Abraham.
        - a. In Genesis 15:1 God promises Himself to Abram... He tells Abram... "I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."
        - b. ISRAEL'S GREAT GIFT IS GOD HIMSELF. HIS PRESENCE AND POWER ABIDING WITH THEM. (This is key to understanding Exodus 32, our text today).
      2. Later in Genesis 22:18 we read that through Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed.
        - a. ISRAEL HAS A ROLE TO BE A LIGHT TO THE NATIONS, TO SHOW GOD'S GLORY, AND DRAW OTHERS TO GOD. (This is also key to understanding Exodus 32).
    - iv. Through Abraham we have the beginning of the nation of Israel.
      1. Abraham and Sarah had Isaac.
      2. Isaac's sons were Jacob and Esau.
      3. Jacob had his name changed to Israel.
      4. Jacob had Joseph.
    - v. By the end of Genesis, we have the nation of Israel in Egypt, and Joseph has died.
  - b. Thus starts the book of Exodus.
    - i. Israel has now been slaves for the last 200 years.
    - ii. Moses, after 10 plagues from God, and Pharaoh letting them go, leads them out of slavery and Egypt through the Red Sea, and to Mount Sinai.
    - iii. Miracle after miracle is being performed as God's presence and power are on display for Israel. They had bread to eat in the morning, and meat to eat each evening...it just appeared. No grocery shopping, God miraculously gave it to them.
    - iv. At Mount Sinai God puts His power on display, and the people are afraid of Him. They send Moses to deal with Him, and speak to them on their behalf.

v. Moses receives the 10 commandments, along with other laws. God promises to be their God, and asks the people to be His people. In Exodus 24:3...the people hear God's laws, and respond in verse 8 by saying, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient."

- c. And after this Moses goes back up the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights and receives more instructions, including how the Tabernacle will look, and be built. For God's manifest presence and power will dwell in the Tabernacle, with the people. Including a sacrificial system of dealing with sin.
  - i. God is making a people for Himself, and preparing to dwell with them in a manifest way.
    - 1. He is giving them laws of love.
    - 2. He is giving slaves, who have never had their own country, the blueprints to be a great nation. When you read the Torah, you see love on each page. How to love God, and how to love your neighbor. The minute details are not foreign to us as Americans, actually the Bible seems a few hundred thousand laws short of even competing with us.
- d. So here we are, Exodus 32...God has been exceedingly kind, compassionate, graceful, generous, powerful, and is in the middle of making preparations to bless the people...and here in Exodus 32, on Israel's honeymoon with the Lord, they decide to reject Him and cheat on Him.

#### IV. Let's read in Exodus 32:1...

*Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for 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."<sup>2</sup> And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me."<sup>3</sup> So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. <sup>4</sup> And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!"<sup>5</sup> So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord."<sup>6</sup> Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.*

#### V.

We have one problem in life, one issue, the same issue Adam and Eve had...we have the problem of "keep believing".

- a. The problem of "keep believing" is our only problem in life. All we have to do is keep believing God is good, kind, generous, graceful, for us, we are His people, and He is our exceeding great reward.
  - i. We lose faith. We don't see God's presence or power. We lose a key spiritual leader in our life, or mentor. We have a bad experience with a Christian, and we lose faith. We stop believing.
- b. Israel, 40 days of not knowing what God was up to with Moses, assumed something went wrong.
  - i. Is that so far fetched?
  - ii. No one told them what was going on...they didn't know. Something could have gone wrong right?
    - 1. They assumed God didn't know what was best for their next move to the promise land.
  - iii. We can relate.
    - 1. Life doesn't go the way we want, and we make plans based on the information we have.
  - iv. The problem is...God has us on a need to know basis...and most of the time we don't need to know.
    - 1. Plus, as He explained to Job in the Old Testament, even if He explained to Job what he was doing, He wouldn't get it.
      - a. Do you believe that?
      - b. That even if God explained to you what He was doing, you and I wouldn't even understand it.
  - v. Israel didn't get that God was planning a fantastic surprise of this thing called the tabernacle that was going to bless them!
- c. Do you believe God is planning a blessing for the future you?
  - i. Even in midst of your enemies?
  - ii. The only way you can receive that blessing is by "keep believing". Just "keep believing" church.

#### VI.

Israel comes up with a back-up god...breaking the second command...and then the first command...in that order. They make a golden idol, and then they worship it.

- a. And Aaron joins right in. He even fashions it. A gold calf.
  - i. Which is interesting?
  - ii. This type of idol would be a nod to the god of bulls, and perhaps fertility which wasn't one of the 10 plagues killing all the livestock, including bulls and cattle?
    - 1. We know certain gods don't really work, but our hearts are idol factories, trying to cope and find joy in life.
- b. Aaron attempts to redirect the people to say that God (Yahweh) is represented by the idol...for whatever that's worth, the people are very pleased with their new god, and decide to have a party as they worship it. Moreover, this is not just any party, clothing is optional.

#### VII.

*<sup>7</sup> And the Lord said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. <sup>8</sup> They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'"<sup>9</sup> And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! (this idea of still-necked would bring the idea of trying to move an animal with a rope, and the animal would lock up, and not move) <sup>10</sup> Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation."<sup>11</sup> Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said: "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? <sup>12</sup> Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. <sup>13</sup> Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" <sup>14</sup> So the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.

- VIII. God decides to destroy all 2 million people, and start over with Moses.
- And Moses intercedes, and asks God to relent.
  - And God listens.
  - Here we see that Moses' prayer and intercession changed history.
    - If he doesn't pray, 2 million people die. Probably that day.
  - Let me make this big point: Your prayers change history. That means the prayers you don't pray, don't impact history.
  - Does this mean, that God truly changed His mind? He had plan A, and He went with plan B?
    - No. I don't think so.
    - Scripture is clear. God knows everything, from beginning to the end. He knew Moses would pray that prayer, it had already been factored in. Instead, God's gift of freewill and choice are on display here.
    - God's Sovereignty, being in complete control of cosmic history, embraces the gift of freewill.
      - God's gives Moses the dignity of choice...as he did for Adam and Eve, and as he does for you and I.
        - God has long ago factored in our prayers, faith or lack of prayers, and faith. He has allowed our faith to be woven into the fabric of eternity and His good purposes.
      - So pray for your lost children...pray without ceasing, as the scriptures tell us. God is not far, He is ever present.
- IX. So Moses intercedes, but on the war path...he heads down the mountain.
- x. <sup>15</sup> And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hand. The tablets were written on both sides; on the one side and on the other they were written. <sup>16</sup> Now the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets. <sup>17</sup> And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp." <sup>18</sup> But he said: "It is not the noise of the shout of victory, Nor the noise of the cry of defeat, But the sound of singing I hear." <sup>19</sup> So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. <sup>20</sup> Then he took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it. <sup>21</sup> And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?" <sup>22</sup> So Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. <sup>23</sup> For they said to me, 'Make us gods that shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' <sup>24</sup> And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them break it off.' So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out."
- XI. I really think Aaron believes what he tells Moses.
- You know Moses, you know these people, they are set on evil.
  - And I barely did anything, just threw some gold in the fire and this popped out.
  - In other words, Moses, it isn't my fault. They made me do it.
    - We know this isn't true.
    - We have this wonderful thing called freewill.
      - Most of the time, we are not forced to do anything.
      - I try to explain this to my kids when one of my kids gets angry and reacts to one of their siblings.
      - What am I saying? I try to explain this to myself, when I get angry when one of my kids doesn't listen, and I respond disappointedly to the offense.
      - Or my spouse does something that I get mad about and I respond with an unkind word...in an unkind tone.
        - I shouldn't pick on Aaron...because I do the same thing. It's in my heart to blame others. And because you are human too...not judging, but aside from the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to own our actions, you can fall prey to the same blame game.
- XII. Nonetheless, Moses is on the war path. We read:
- <sup>25</sup> Now when Moses saw that the people were unrestrained (this means they were naked) (for Aaron had not restrained them, to their shame among their enemies), <sup>26</sup> then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, "Whoever is on the Lord's side—come to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. <sup>27</sup> And he said to them, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.'" <sup>28</sup> So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day. <sup>29</sup> Then Moses said, "Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother."
- This is not a pretty scene. Moses basically says, if you are with the Lord, stand over here. He gives everyone a chance. Then he basically says, anyone that doesn't have pants on, kill them.
  - Now we laugh, but scripture says that their enemies were aware of what these "so called" God followers were doing. They seemed to be just like them.
    - Israel is God's people however, called to reflect God's glory to the nations. Their enemies saw how Moses dealt with this type of idolatry.

- ii. The 3000 people had opportunity to repent, but did not. Israel, in it's infancy, cannot stumble in their fidelity to the Lord without repercussions. Here, the repercussions were their very lives.

XIII. We wrap up the story starting in verse 30...

XIV. *<sup>30</sup>Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." <sup>31</sup>Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! <sup>32</sup>Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written." <sup>33</sup>And the Lord said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. <sup>34</sup>Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin." <sup>35</sup>So the Lord plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made.*

- a. We know that this incident followed and plagued the people of Israel. The Bible isn't clear on how the Lord delivered punishment. However, Israel continued to miss God's mark, and punishment and plagues continued to beseech them.
- b. I want to draw your attention to Moses' attempt to "make atonement" for the people in verse 30.
  - i. He attempts to trade his life for a return of God's presence and power with the people.
  - ii. He is willing to go to hell, if that means God will return to good standing with them.
  - iii. God turns Moses down on his offer. One, Moses is a sinful man, and cannot atone for the people.
- c. What God does instead is let the people over the next 7 months build the Tabernacle and then in Lev: 9:6-7...the people are finally able to sacrifice and make atonement for their sins.
  - i. And thus continues the on again off again relationship Israel shows us in the Old Testament.

XV. So what's the Big Application from Exodus 32 for us today?

XVI. Flee Idolatry.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:6 - 7, *<sup>6</sup>Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. "And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. In the same passage of 1 Corinthians 10:13 - 14 we read: <sup>13</sup>No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. <sup>14</sup>Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.*

- a. Idols are anything that we derive our primary identity and joy from. In America, the big 3 idols are money, sex, and power.
- b. Idols are formed when we stop believing in God's presence and power as our primary source of identity and joy. He is our exceedingly great reward.
  - i. But I'm not here today to list every single idol we could possibly build and make us all feel guilty about ourselves. No. That's not the gospel. That's not good news. We aren't anti-money, sex or power. We are just pro-Jesus...
- c. The lesson for us today is to attempt to stay as mindful as possible, that God Himself is our reward. Our relationship with the very present, very powerful God is our utmost longing and need.
  - i. We want to stay as close to that truth as possible.
  - ii. Let me illustrate it this way:
    - 1. In Australia, the cattle ranches are thousands of acres. Fencing them would be near impossible. Instead of fencing to keep livestock on their property, owners build watering holes. The livestock never wander too far away from the source of life, the watering hole. If they did, they'd die.
    - 2. The truth that God Himself is our exceedingly great reward is a watering hole.
      - a. Keep believing this.
      - b. Keep believing, don't stop believing.
      - c. Repeat after me.
        - i. God Himself, is my exceedingly great reward!

XVII. Challenge

- a. Let me give you 3 simple ways to build, strengthen, and protect your "keep believing."
- b. Pray, Read, Fellowship.
- c. When people want to get healthy, they say it's as simple as sleep, eat right and exercise.
- d. Well, the simple way to build, strengthen and protect your "keep believing" fervor is Pray, Read, and Fellowship.
  - i. *Pray.* Everyday. Without ceasing. Pray promises. Prayer requests. Intercession. Start changing history.
  - ii. *Read* Scripture, everyday. Whatever you can. I have a new app by thebibleproject.com people that is awesome. It comes with helpful videos that explain what is going on in the portion of Scripture you are reading.
  - iii. *Fellowship.* Attend Church. Worship. Have Christian friends, that you talk with about spiritual things.
    - 1. It's that last one that is the most important...having Christians friends. You are able to talk about real stuff.
- e. When we pray, read and fellowship...our "keep believing" gets stronger and stronger.
  - i. If you are in a dry place with God.
  - ii. If you have lost your fervor for the Lord...go back to the simple basics.
  - iii. Sleep, exercise and eat right...aka...pray, read scripture, fellowship.