

July 14, 2019

Speaker: Eric Naus **Series:** God With Us **Passage:** Exodus 32:1-35

Community Group Questions: "The Futility of Idolatry"

1. Read Exodus 32:1-6. Panicked that Moses was never coming back, the Israelites quickly fell into idolatry – they crafted a golden calf that resembled the gods of Egypt, and they gave the calf credit for what God had done in rescuing them from Egypt. Idolatry is more than just an ancient problem. It’s a modern problem too! Tim Keller writes, “The human heart takes good things like a successful career, love, material possessions, even family, and turns them into ultimate things. Our hearts deify them as the center of our lives, because, we think, they can give us significance and security, safety and fulfillment, if we attain them... Anything in life can serve as an idol, a God-alternative, a counterfeit god... If anything becomes more fundamental than God to your happiness, meaning in life, and identity, then it is an idol.” (Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, xiv-xix).

Based on Keller’s definition, what idols are you tempted to worship in your life? How do you look to these idols to find ultimate happiness, meaning, and identity?

2. Read Exodus 32:7-14. In this section of the story, God threatens judgment, but then, in a round-about way, God invites Moses to make a case as to why he should give the people mercy instead (note the implied invitation in the words “let me alone” in vs. 10. The suggestion is that if Moses will *not leave God alone*, perhaps judgment can be spared). Moses then makes several arguments as to why God should forgive his people: 1) because of his great redeeming love for them (vs. 11), 2) because his very reputation is bound up with them (vs. 12), and 3) because of his faithfulness to his promise (v. 13). And so, God relents. How does this entire scene point us to Jesus and his work on our behalf as our “intercessor” before the Father? (see Hebrews 7:25). Does it encourage you to know that God the Father is pleased to look to God the Son, our great mediator, and grant us unending forgiveness and grace?
3. Read 32:15-20. In this section, Moses smashes the 10 commandments (to publicly show that the people had broken God’s commandments) and then he takes the calf and melts it down, grinds it to powder, and makes the people drink it! This symbolic act was meant to show the people just how futile their idols really were: the golden calf promised them the world, but delivered a stomach ache! Their fancy idol was really nothing more than golden refuse! It’s a reminder to us that our idols are futile too – they make “god-sized promises” that they cannot really keep. In your life, when have you most clearly seen the emptiness and futility of the idols you were chasing? Tell the story.
4. Read verses 21-29. Notice two responses to idolatry: Aaron makes excuses. The Levites take responsibility and fight for holiness. What would it look like for us if we took full responsibility and fought for holiness in our lives? What practical steps do we need to take to conquer the particular idols that we face? How can your community group hold each other accountable in taking those steps?

5. Read 32:30-35. In this gripping scene, Moses suggests that God should take his life in order that the people might be spared and forgiven. In other words, Moses was suggesting human sacrifice as the ultimate remedy for the people's idolatry (see vs. 32). God turns Moses down, and judges the people with a plague instead (see. Vs. 35). However, Moses' offer points us to the final solution to idolatry that Jesus would one day bring! On the cross, Jesus would suffer the consequences of our idolatry, so that all those who trust in him could be fully and finally set free! How is Jesus and his gospel the only true remedy for idolatry? How does the gospel change us from the inside out, and truly set us free?

Prayer suggestion: Spend time confessing your idols to God, naming them one by one in prayer. Ask God to fill you with power and conviction to keep Jesus in place as the supreme affection of your life!