

## Sin in the Camp

Part 1

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### Sin in the Camp, Part 1 Exodus 32:1-6

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, please open with me to 1 Corinthians 10, and we will get to Exodus in a minute. This is an exciting day for the Platt family. This is the first time all 4 of us will be in worship. All of you, who are sick, just don't breathe on Joshua, please. I would greatly appreciate it.

Last week, we talked about hunger for God's glory to be restored in His Church, why we are praying and fasting, and why we are continuing that this week. On Tuesday 6:00 to 8:00 a.m. this room is open so we continue to pray and fast. It has been so encouraging to hear stories from you, to get emails, to get people sharing about how God is using this time in your own lives and families. There are even students who are offering to fast from school. So let us be reminded that there are ways to abuse this whole picture. But as we fast and pray together, ask God to restore his glory in the church. And last week, we talked about whether or not we are wanting to see the holiness of God restored in his church. I mentioned last week that if we don't want to see the holiness of God restored in his church, then you might not want to come back the next week, meaning today. And many of you came back, and some of you missed that line, and you may be wishing you hadn't.

But I want us to talk this morning about the holiness of God, and the depth of our need to see His holiness restored in His church. I want us to begin to look at a picture of sin in the camp. We are starting at 1 Corinthians 10, because 1 Corinthians 10 tells us how to read and understand Exodus 32. So look with me at 1 Corinthians 10:6. This is New Testament, a guy named Paul, writing this. *"Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: 'The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry'"* (1 Cor. 10:6-7). He's quoting there from the Old Testament. Does anyone know where he's quoting from? Exodus 32:6. He's quoting from the very passage that we're going to study this morning. He talks a little more and gets to verse 11, and he says this, *"These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come"* (1 Cor. 10:11).

Understand from the very beginning of our time together this morning that what we're about to look at in Exodus 32 happened as an example for us. Exodus 32 is a warning for us. So this ancient story from the beginning of the Old Testament is intended to be a commentary on our spiritual lives—on your life, my life, and our relationship to God. With that understanding, take a hike back with me to the left into Exodus 32. We will start in Verse 1 (it's the 2<sup>nd</sup> book in the Bible—Genesis, Exodus 32).

While you are turning there, let's get the context. We were in Exodus 33 a couple of weeks ago. Just a reminder, God's people had been slaves in Egypt in the beginning of Exodus, and God delivered them out of slavery in Egypt through miraculous plagues, He split the sea in half, sent His people through on dry land, He gave them food from heaven and water from rocks, and He brought them to Mt. Sinai, where He gave them His Ten

Commandments, and He gave them the Law and entered into covenant relationship with them, that covenant confirmed in Exodus 24. God has given His people the Law, and then Moses went back on the mountain to meet with God. And the people were down at the bottom of the mountain. While Moses, the representative of the people of God, was at the top of the mountain, the people of God at the bottom of the mountain did this (Exodus 32:1):

*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 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.' Aaron answered them, 'Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.' So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. 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, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, 'Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord.' So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry. Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. 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.'" 'I have seen these people,' the Lord said to Moses, 'and they are a stiff-necked people. 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' (Ex. 32:1-11)*

God, we pray that you would help us this morning to heed the warning of Exodus 32. God, help us to see what causes holy anger to burn. And God help us not just to see their sin, help us to see ourselves in the mirror of this text. Help us to see our sin, and help us to see your great salvation in Christ. It's in His name we pray, we study, we preach, and we worship. Amen.

The focus in this passage is not on any one individual person's sin. Instead, the focus is on the sin among the people of God. You see, when God tells Moses to go down (in verse 7), He says go down because your people have sinned. As a result, the focus of our time together this morning is not intended to be a focus on any one individual's sin in the church, any one individual sin in this room. The focus of our time together is on our sin as the church. You and I together in this thing—we talked about this the last couple of weeks, we are a community of faith, we are a people, we are in this together, we are His people. And the focus in Exodus 32 is on the sin of the people.

### **Our Corporate Confession...**

What I want to do this morning is show us 4 ways that we as a people in the church today are reflecting the people of Exodus 32. These are some heavy truths. I don't want us to even say that we are reflecting these things in the Church today. I believe we are reflecting these things in The Church at Brook Hills. I believe the sin in the camp in Exodus 32 is reflected in the sin in the camp of The Church at Brook Hills in 2008. Some of you might be

thinking, we don't have golden calves. Ladies and gentlemen, the contemporary Church is filled with golden calves, and I'm convinced The Church at Brook Hills is filled with golden calves even across the room this morning. So I want to lead us, as pastor of this church, in corporate confession based on the mirror we see in Exodus 32—four ways that we need to confess exactly what they are doing here.

### **We Have Sought Leaders Without Conviction**

First confession: We, as God's people (again, not any one individual), we as God's people have sought leaders without conviction. We have sought leaders without conviction. Moses and Joshua are up on the mountain. Joshua's kind of hanging out there while Moses is talking with God. And they left Aaron in charge (Exodus 24:14) Moses said, "Aaron will lead you while I'm gone." And the Bible says in the very beginning (Exodus 32:1), "*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 who will go before us.'*" That says "so long in coming down from the mountain," Moses spent a total of 40 days on the mountain—just over a month. This is astonishing that the people of God, who had been delivered out of years in slavery, through all of these plagues; who had seen a sea split in half; who had seen God provide in such miraculous ways on this journey; who had seen the presence of God revealed on a mountain in front of them; who had entered into covenant with God; in just about a month's time, are coming to Aaron saying we want gods. We need you to make us some gods that we can trust. And Aaron does exactly what the people wanted him to do. The leader gave a sinful people exactly what they wanted.

I am convinced that we have created a church culture today that revolves around much the same picture. We seek out leaders who will give us exactly what we want. We want leaders who will draw crowds and who will please people, and if he is doing those things, he is successful. We want them to give us what we expect in success, regardless of their prayer lives, regardless of their knowledge of the Word, regardless of their holiness or purity, we want their popularity instead. We want them to give us what we are asking for. It does not take long to look across the contemporary church landscape and to see that the church in contemporary thought is considered to be focused on meeting people's felt needs. In fact, there are many leaders in the church today who would say, "Don't title a sermon *Sin in the Camp*." Do you think that gets people excited on Sunday morning when they walk in? You're going to talk about sin in the camp? Talk about what makes people feel good, and what makes people happy.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am convinced that I would be committing the sin of Aaron if I stood in front of God's people in the middle of an idolatrous Christianity that loves money, sex, power, positions, success, sports, and family more than we love God. If I attempted to lead us through a comfortable, coffee-house Christianity filled with sermons on brokenness and grace that comfort us in our sin, but never confront us in our sin; if I led us in cultural Christianity that prioritizes man-centered traditions over God-centered truth; if I led us in a cheap Christianity that promises you everything and costs you nothing-- this is what we want, and we have prioritized what we want over what God says we need, and we have sought leaders without conviction.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are a people who have rebelled against an infinitely, holy God, and we have sought leaders who have no conviction about that—either in their personal lives or in their leadership in His church. And don't think that this is an easy thing to even address—to know that I would even be held up to the standard that Scripture puts in front of us. But we need to repent of seeking leaders without conviction when it comes to holiness, purity, and the power of the Word of God. We have sought leaders without conviction.

## **We Have Devised Salvation Without Dedication**

Second confession: We have devised salvation without dedication. We have devised salvation without dedication. You had to realize in Egypt when they were slaves there, these were the kinds of gods they worshipped. It was very common to fashion a god in the form of an animal like this—an idol. And whether that was actually the god or a representation of god, this was a common practice in Egypt, which makes this whole picture almost ironic, that God's people have been saved from Egypt, and yet they are indulging in the worship of the gods of Egypt. They've been delivered from that, and yet they are indulging in that which they have been delivered from.

Look in verse 4—this is real interesting, it says Aaron took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool; and listen to what he said. It says they said, *"These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."* Now hold your place there and go back to Exodus 20—look at verse 1. This is when God enters into covenant relationship with His people through His law. Listen to what He says in Exodus 20:1. This is the beginning of the Ten Commandments if you know this chapter. It says, *"And God spoke all these words: 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.'"* The same phrase that God uses in entering into His covenant with His people is the same phrase they're using, *"These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt"* (Ex. 32:4). Same phrase here in Exodus 32:4. The only difference is, they are attributing to a golden calf and to multiple gods what God, the Lord, Yahweh God, did on their behalf. What is interesting is that they are claiming salvation while they indulge in sin. They are even using their salvation as a justification for their sin. Do you catch that? Claiming salvation while they indulge in sin—using salvation, their deliverance, as a justification for their indulging in sin. Their salvation was now just a way by which they could enjoy sin.

When we look in the mirror of this text, the story is repeated time and again today. We can live however we want, we think after all we're saved. We tell people, "You pray this prayer, and the rest of your life you can live however you want. And if you've prayed this prayer, then you will go to heaven." And as a result, scores of people indulge in sin year after year, after year, and they think, "Well, I prayed a prayer when I was younger, so I'm okay."

Ladies and gentlemen, this is not biblical salvation. Please don't get me wrong here, I'm not saying in any way that our salvation is dependent on our works. On the contrary, our salvation is dependent on the work of Christ, and Christ alone, it is His death on a cross, and His resurrection from the grave that enables us to be forgiven of our sins. It is only the work of Christ, "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not from yourselves it is a gift of God, so that no one can boast." That is clear in Scripture. I'm not saying anything different from that. But we've got to realize by grace you've been saved through faith, it's faith not from yourselves—it is a gift of God—a free gift of God. Part of that free gift of God that He gives us at salvation is a new heart! And it is a heart that does not want to return to sin. It's a heart that does not delight to indulge in sin. We have been regenerated in our hearts from the inside out at that point of salvation where we begin to desire what Christ desires—begin to want what Christ wants.

And this business of praying a prayer, and then living however we want after that does violence to the very salvation we claim. We have been given a new heart! Ladies and gentlemen, you have a new heart in Christ. And you have been set free from sin! You have not been delivered out of Egypt to go hang out back in Egypt the rest of your lives. You've been set free from Egypt! You've been set free from Egypt! You are free from sin! You are free from the power of sin! You are free from the power of sin! This is salvation! And nowhere, absolutely nowhere in Scripture, does Jesus intend to bring you salvation without

leading you to live a life of dedication to Him on the basis of the work of Christ. And at that point when we are saved, it is Christ in us enabling us and empowering us to live in a way that glorifies His name. You have been set free! You don't live however you want anymore. You don't have the right to live however you want anymore, Christian. You sacrificed that right when you came to faith in Christ—He owns the rights. You are not on the throne of your heart anymore. Christ is on the throne of your heart, and it is a good thing because now you are free to experience all that your Creator designed for your life.

So get out of Egypt, and stop devising church. Stop devising a salvation that requires no dedication whatsoever. This is the very gospel that is at stake here. We have sought leaders without conviction, and we have devised salvation without dedication.

### **We Have Manufactured Worship Without Humiliation**

Third confession—We have manufactured worship without humiliation. We have manufactured worship without humiliation. Exodus 32:5—this is fascinating here—When Aaron saw what was happening, he built an altar in front of the calf—an altar—he built an altar—and he announced that tomorrow there will be a festival to the who? To the Lord. To the Lord. So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Do you see what is happening here? They are taking the very guidelines God had established for worship, and they are participating in those guidelines without God. Now sure, they said, *'Tomorrow we'll have a festival to the Lord,'* but we know it's evident across this text, this is not worship, a picture for God—who are they worshipping? Verse 6 really helps us out with that. It says the next day they sacrificed these offerings, and afterward they sat down to eat and drink, and got up to indulge in revelry. This is a word that is used in other points in the Old Testament to talk about sexual activity that is not pleasing to God. The reality is, they were not worshipping God, they were worshipping who? They were worshipping themselves. They were worshipping themselves under the guiles of worshipping God. You see it? Worshipping themselves under the guiles of worshipping God. Do you think it is possible for us? Do you think we could be guilty of the same?

We know the way to do this deal. We sing, we pray, we listen, we give, and we go home. The reality is much deeper than that—we sing songs that are most pleasing to us, and if they're not, then we let somebody know they weren't. We pray, but not for too long, and not in a way that would make us feel uncomfortable, not in a way that would take us out of our comfort zone. We pray just because that is part of what we do, and we listen as long as we like what the guy in front of us has to say, and for scores of us, as soon as the guy finishes talking, we check out and we're out of here. And we give, but the reality is a very small percentage, less than 10% most likely, are really committed to giving in The Church at Brook Hills. And we go home to get on with the rest of our week. Who have we worshipped? Who have we worshipped? We have catered everything to revolve around us! And to even begin to pull out of that causes all kinds of strife and difficulties and disagreements. Worshipping self under the guiles of worshipping God.

And the question I ask, church, is, "Where is brokenness and humility in our worship?" Where are the people of Nehemiah 8, who when the Word was opened, they stood to their feet, they raised their hands, and they cried out Amen! Amen! And then they bowed down with their faces to the ground. When have we ever seen that in contemporary worship? Where is Ezra who got up, it says, out of self-abasement, his cloak and tunic torn, and he fell on his knees and spread his hands before God, and he cried out saying, "I am too ashamed and too disgraced to even lift my face before you." The people... Where are the people of Ezra Chapter 10 who are gathering together and weeping before God, and calling out for hours, for hours, their unfaithfulness before a covenant God? Such a scene would be

far too extreme for us today. God, help us, brokenness and humility far too extreme for us in worship. Meanwhile, God says this is the one I esteem He who is humble and contrite in spirit and who trembles at my Word (Is. 66:2).

The sacrifices of God, a broken heart, a broken and contrite heart, Oh God you will not despise (Ps. 51:17). If my people, He says, if my people who are called by name will do what? Will humble themselves and pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land (2 Chr. 7:14).

We have taken this picture of brokenness and humility (and it is all over Scripture) out of our worship. And I want to remind us today, that if there is no room for brokenness and humility in our worship, then there is no room for God in our worship—no room for God—because self dominates. We have manufactured worship without humiliation, without being humbled before the God of the universe in His Word, at which we're suppose to tremble. We have sought leaders without conviction, we have devised salvation without dedication, we have manufactured worship without humiliation.

### **We Have Created a god Without Retribution**

Fourth confession: We have created a god without retribution. We have created a god without retribution. This is the duty of the golden calf. You can set up an altar to the golden calf, and you can give offerings to the golden calf, and you can indulge in revelry before the golden calf, and the golden calf will do nothing to you. There will be no response from the golden calf, he will sit there. R.C. Sproul summed it up best. He said, "The cow gave no law and demanded no obedience. It had no wrath, or justice, or holiness to be feared. It was deaf, dumb, and impotent; but at least it could not intrude on their fun and call them to judgment. This was a religion designed by men, practiced by men, and ultimately useless for men."

Isn't this what we want? A god who is okay with our lifestyles? A god who is not going to intrude on our fun. A god who will allow us to indulge in all our fleshly pleasures, and we can still worship him? Isn't this the god that we want? This is really the core issue, isn't it? Isn't the core issue the fact that we have created a god out of love and compassion who has no holiness or wrath or justice to be feared? Haven't we created a god who would not think of disciplining or punishing us or the people around us for our sin? Haven't we created a god who would not think of sending anyone, allowing anyone, if we were even to use that word, to go to eternal damnation, as long as they lived their best life here, and they gave their best shot here?

We have created a god without retribution. And ladies and gentlemen, this is not God, this is a golden calf. It's a golden calf. Because the God of the Bible is a God of retribution, and His holiness is to be feared, and His wrath is real, and His holy anger is real, and in His holiness, He is obligated to obliterate sinners. Now that doesn't sound exciting! And it almost sounds a little too strong, but I remind you, verse 10, "Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them." There is no stronger language than that! And, ladies and gentlemen, we are them! We are them!

Sure there's not a golden calf up here in the middle, but we are them! All of these things are prevalent in us—us as a people. We are them! God help us to realize that we are them! And, God, help us to realize the gravity of what that means! And when we do realize the depth of what it means to seek out leaders without conviction, and to devise salvation without conviction, and to devise salvation without dedication, to manufacture worship without humiliation, and to create a god without retribution—when we realize the depth of

that picture of sin, it is at that point we will realize that we need exactly what they needed in Exodus 32. And what they needed was not a new leader. What they needed was not a new exodus. What they needed was not new worship practices—they needed a Savior! They needed someone to save them from their idolatry. They needed someone to save them from the depth of their sin. They needed someone to transform their hearts—and ladies and gentlemen, we have one!! Praise God, we have one!! Exodus 32—not a fun passage to study all week—please do not think that I sit and study all week thinking, I can’t wait to get them with this one.

## **Our Corporate Celebration...**

### **Jesus Takes our Retribution**

I’m a part of this just as much as you are. We’re in this thing together! But the beauty of Exodus 32—yes, the beauty of a God who says I will destroy them—is the fact that when we confess our sin before this God—when we come honestly before this God—when we do fall on our faces before this God—our confession is transformed into celebration because we have a Savior. From corporate confession to corporate celebration, ladies and gentlemen, Jesus takes our retribution. Do not underestimate the wrath of God, because at that point, you devalue the purpose of the cross of Christ.

Ladies and gentlemen, yes, yes, yes God has holy anger against sin. Yes, His wrath is dead set against sin. Yes, the payment for sin is destruction and death, and yes, Jesus Christ has taken that retribution upon Himself so that you and I do not have to bear it. He has taken your place, He has taken my place. He has taken our place—Jesus takes our retribution—that’s reason to celebrate.

### **Jesus Exalts us in our Humiliation**

Not only does He take our retribution, but Jesus exalts us in our humiliation. Don’t miss it! When we manufacture worship without humiliation, we’re exalting ourselves—God is saying, you’re missing the whole point. Matthew 23:12 -- He who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be what? Exalted—Jesus says this. When you humble yourself, I will lift you up. Let God do the exalting, let God do the lifting—this is what worship is about! Because He gets glory in the way He lifts us up from our sin.

### **Jesus Enables our Dedication**

Jesus takes our retribution. Jesus exalts us in our humiliation, and Jesus enables our dedication. Please do not get from this picture—well, you pray a prayer and you live however you want, you miss salvation, so I’ve got to do better in my life—absolutely not. The whole point of salvation is you come to the end of yourself, you realize you can’t do it—there is nothing you can do to muster up this Christ life on your own—it is Christ who does it in you—Christ in you—enabling you—empowering you to lead your family, Christ in you, enabling you and empowering you to honor Him in holiness and in purity—to live a life in Birmingham and in all nations that exalts Him. Christ alone can do that in us—he enables our dedication when we trust in Him. That’s the whole point of salvation. This is not just a moment of salvation—it is a lifetime of salvation. A lifetime dedicated to His glory, and Him doing His work in us, for the sake of His name. Jesus takes our retribution, He exalts us in our humiliation, and He enables our dedication.

### **Jesus Restores Our Conviction**

And when we are surrounded in a world by leaders with no conviction about the greatness of God, Jesus restores our conviction, because when Christ takes hold in us, then Christ

raises up leaders in the church who display His holiness, His purity, His power, and who can be trusted to lead His people. Christ does all of those things. He does all of those things.

The whole point of Exodus 32 is to show us our need for Christ. And ladies and gentlemen, Church at Brook Hills, we need Christ. We need Christ! This morning I want us to express our need for Christ. And over the next few moments, we're going to pray. I hope in light of what we see in Scripture, we're going to pray in confession.

Now what we think about when we think about confession is we think "God, I know I did this wrong, and I pray that you'll forgive me. Okay, I guess that was it," and kind of walk on. At that point, have you seen the depth of the words you've just expressed? Absolutely not. Confession takes time. It's a calling out—it's why you get to Nehemiah 9 & 10—they confessed their sins for hours. Hours they are confessing. We reduce it to 15 seconds. It's calling out to God over and over and over again. You're saying, "Well, didn't He hear me the first time?" Yes! But this is an opportunity to express the depth of our need before God—the depth of our need for His forgiveness and His grace! We confess our sins. So I want us to spend some time in confession, an extended time in confession. And over the next few moments, whether you sit where you are or you fall on your faces where you are, or fall on your faces across the front here, I want us as a people to come before God in corporate confession.

You can pray silently if you'd rather, you can pray aloud where you are in front, altogether, not just one person praying aloud. All of us feel free to do that—God hears us all. We're going to come before God in corporate confession as His people—not for what this guy did or that guy did, or what my son really needs to work on, or what my mom could really get figured out in her life—we are in this thing together—this is corporate confession, and we're going to let corporate confession lead us to corporate celebration. We're going to let corporate confession lead us to our need for Jesus Christ.

Father, we pray that in the next few moments, God, that you would transform our understanding of our sin. God help us not to treat the next few moments casually. For your people around this room, we pray that you would bring us every second of the next few minutes into a deeper, deeper, and deeper awareness of our need for you. Even for people who are here this morning who do not know you, who are not numbered among your people who've trusted in Christ at this point. Father, I pray that even now you would bring great conviction of sin in their hearts and their lives. God, that all across this room we would see our need for you, and you give us grace to express that—to call out to you for forgiveness. And, God, we trust that as we confess our sins, you are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness and our confession, we trust, will lead us right to the throne of Jesus Christ. And we will celebrate the one who takes our retribution. We will celebrate the one who exalts us in our humiliation, enables our dedication, and the only one who can restore our conviction. God, we come before you, right now, as your people. And we pray that you would forgive us for the sins of Exodus 32 that we have seen this morning.

I invite you to a time of confession all across this room.

Romans 6:16 says—*Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*



*Verse 22—But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:22-23).*

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