

# Exodus 32:15-25 // Sin: Consequences and Remedy

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our reading this evening is from Exodus 32, starting at verse 14.! It's on page 91 in the church bibles.

! Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of covenant law in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God. The writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, Moses, there is the sound of war in the camp. Moses replied, it's not the sound of victory.

It's not the sound of defeat. It's the sound of singing that I hear. When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burns.

[ 1 : 15 ] And he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf the people had made and burned it in the fire.

Then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it. He said to Aaron, what did these people do to you that you led them into such great sin?

Do not be angry, my Lord, Aaron answered. You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me, make us gods who will go before us.

As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we don't know what's happened to him. So I told them, whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.

Then they gave me the gold and I threw it into the fire and out came this calf. Moses saw that the people were running wild.

[ 2 : 12 ] And Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughing stock to their enemies. So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, whoever is for the Lord, come to me.

And all the Levites rallied to him. Then he said to them, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says. Each man strap a sword to his side, go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.

The Levites did as Moses commanded. And that day, about 3000 of the people died. Then Moses said, you have been set apart to the Lord today.

For you were against your own sons and brothers and he has blessed you this day. The next day, Moses said to the people, you have committed a great sin.

Now, I will go up to the Lord. Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin. So Moses went back to the Lord and said, oh, what a great sin these people have committed.

[ 3 : 26 ] They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin. But if not, then block me out of the book that you have written.

The Lord replied to Moses, whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. 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. And the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks, Rob. And it would be a great help if you keep your Bibles open at Exodus chapter 32.

This is our second week in this chapter in the Bible's significant chapter. So let's pray and ask for God's help as we come to his word.

[ 4 : 35 ] Oh Lord God, we've been reminded already that you are a God who speaks. Lord, we pray that you would speak to our minds and hearts this evening.

We pray that the Holy Spirit would do a work in each of our souls. We pray that you'd convict us and comfort us and challenge us.

For we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, none of us here this evening, none of us here is free from the struggle with sin.

The question isn't whether we're sinful, it's what we're doing about it. And for the original readers, Exodus chapter 32 would have been a chilling reminder of the depths of depravity that we're all capable of.

A chilling reminder of just how close they came to blowing it completely and losing out in God's favor like that. And the golden calf was to the people of Israel what the fall of man in Genesis chapter 3 was to the whole of humanity.

[ 5 : 54 ] Exodus 32 is Genesis chapter 3 all over again. So just a few chapters to go back in Exodus chapter 24. Almost immediately, they're making a calf god to worship.

They're breaking God's commandments. And the way the book of Exodus is arranged highlights just how catastrophic it is. Highlights how significant this whole episode is.

So you can see the structure of this section of Exodus on the slide if we move on to the next slide. A more detailed version is in the service sheet.

But basically in this block of Exodus, there are two main construction projects. There's the tabernacle and there's the golden calf.

And the golden calf is sandwiched in, as you can see, between the instructions for making the tabernacle and the description of the tabernacle. Two main construction projects, two major construction projects.

[ 7 : 07 ] The one ordained by God, the other prohibited by God. Now for us, Exodus chapter 32 is one of the chapters in the Bible that just warns us that God takes sin very seriously.

That warns us that we should take sin very seriously. It warns us not to trivialize sin in our lives. Now we'd expect the chapter to go like this.

The people sin. God is angry. Moses prays. And then verse 14, God relents. Everything is okay. That's basically the sermon from last week, more or less.

That's how you expect the chapter to go. But that's not how it ends up. Here's how it goes. They sin. Moses prays.

God is still angry. Moses prays again. God is still angry. Notice, the terrible judgments come after Moses prays.

[ 8 : 20 ] He prays in verses 11 to 14. And then in verse 28, we have the Levite execution squad. And they carry out the Lord's judgment on 3,000 people.

So then Moses goes back to the Lord, verse 31, and he says, What a great sin these people have committed. They've made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sins.

And then look at verse 35. They're treated just like the Egyptians were. The Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did.

You want the chapter to go, sin, prayer, everything okay. Everything back to normal. But actually, the chapter goes, sin, prayer.

God kills 3,000 people. Prayer. Prayer. God kills more people by a plague. So this chapter warns us that it's not cheap.

[ 9 : 28 ] It warns us to take it seriously. It warns us to take sin seriously. It warns when it comes to sin, God is deadly serious. Well, thanks be to God.

There is a path to overcoming sin. And the first step is knowing what we're up against. Knowing what sin does to us.

So first, the seduction of sin. Right, so they're heading down the mountain. Moses picks up Joshua on the way. And they're heading back to base camp.

But before it even comes into sight, they start to hear some sounds. And there's lots of audio in this chapter. And it's just faintly to begin with, perhaps, that sure enough, louder and louder.

What could it be? Well, verse 17, Joshua makes out the noise of people shouting. He reckons it must be war. But Moses is more tuned in, verse 18.

[ 10 : 28 ] It's not the sound of victory. It's not the sound of defeat. It's the sound of singing that I hear. Now, of course, there's nothing automatically wrong with singing or dancing.

We've had good singing back in Exodus 15. Praise to God. But this here ain't the sound of music. The musical, I mean. As they approach the camp, now Moses sees for himself in plain sight their

singing and dancing for a cow.

So here, the sound of singing is the sound of sinning. These beats are bad. The hills are alive with the sounds of sinning.

And if you ask them, if you ask them, are you having a good time? What would they say? They're having a great time, aren't they? They're having the time of their lives.

Sin rarely makes you feel bad in the moment. If sin sucked, you just wouldn't do it, would you? That is the seduction of sin.

[ 11 : 38 ] Sin makes promises. It tells lies, but it makes promises. Satan always presents the bait, but hides the hook. The fish see the bait and swims towards it.

We sin because it's pleasurable. Before we came to St. Silas as a family, we were part of a church plant on the south side of the city.

And from time to time, we posted many testimonies on our social media, before and after stories, to kind of get the word out there about the church. And when it came to my turn, and reflecting back on my wild lifestyle of my rebellious years, I wrote, sure, it was fun, or so it seemed at the time, but it was hollow.

It was ultimately meaningless. Sin is making the dancing people happy here, but the soundtrack of sin is about to get cut short.

The party's over, and the people are facing up to one massive hangover, because sin has serious consequences. It messes with who we are.

[ 12 : 52 ] It messes with our relationships, first and foremost, with our relationship with God. So I remember way back at school, on a school trip to Disneyland Paris, Euro Disney as it was back then, a double-decker bus all the way from Scotland, deposited us in some kind of, what you can only describe as a post-apocalyptic suburb of Paris, tower blocks everywhere.

And shortly after arriving at the hostel, we were summoned by the teacher to lay out some ground rules at a meeting. And as the teacher read out these house rules, we realized that in the 30 or so minutes that we'd been there, since we'd got there, we'd already broken half the rules, the boys' dorm at least.

No jumping on beds, no projectiles out of windows, no smoking, no setting fire to things in general. It was the 1990s, we had to be reminded of these things back then.

But at this point, the boy who'd turned his can of Lynx Africa deodorant spray into sort of makeshift flame thrower, with the help of a lighter, probably shouldn't tell you that, he looked more than just a little bit sheepish at that point.

Anyway, don't try this at home, kids. It is dangerous. Actually, we were lucky to make it through the 90s. But we'd broken all the rules before we were given them. I say we, I mean that collectively.

[ 14 : 24 ] I personally hadn't perhaps broken all of them. But back in Exodus 32, there at the foot of a mountain, at the very place where they'd sworn to do everything God had said, Moses sees for himself, they'd broken the law almost as soon as it was given.

And you get a sense, don't you? Just how serious it is from what Moses does next. He smashes up two things in verse 19.

He smashes up the stone tablets and he smashes up the golden calf. Three things if you include the two tablets plus the golden calf. Well, did you notice how the tablets were described at the beginning of the reading?

In verse 16, the tablets were what? They were the work of God. The writing was the writing of God engraved on a tablet.

Moses hasn't just dropped his iPad. It's not as if he can just pop into a local Apple store and get a replacement screen. These tablets, they're the handiwork of God.

[ 15 : 32 ] They're the handwriting of God. And whereas the people had sought to make themselves a God, the tablets are the work of the true God.

And on them, God himself wrote that they should not make for themselves false gods. So we've got this contrast, this big contrast between the true God who makes the law and the false God who breaks the law.

And in the people's idolatry, they've smashed up their relationship with God. That's why Moses smashes up the tablets coming down the mountain.

That's what it symbolizes, a smashed up relationship with God. He also smashes up the calf God. And there's no half measures here.

He sets fire to it. He burns it. He pulverizes it. He liquefies it. He makes the people drink it. This God, this so-called God is so impotent that you can drink down this God like downing a shot of Goldschlager.

[16:41] Not only that, but it can pass through your system. They're going to ingest it. They're going to taste the bitterness of worshiping a false God.

It's like the dad who buys his son a pack of cigarettes and makes him smoke the whole thing. So he throws up and learns his lesson. That's what Moses is doing. The people have smashed up their relationship with God.

So Moses goes and confronts Aaron in verse 21. Moses said to his brother Aaron, what did these people do to you that you led them into such a great sin?

And if you were to ask what would we want to see from Aaron in this moment, I guess we'd want to see an acknowledgement of something of the seriousness of the sin, something of his personal responsibility for it.

And then we'd want to hear that he's genuinely repentant, genuinely resolved to turn away from his wrongdoing. Instead, we get an idiot's guide of how not to repent.

[17:55] So first he downplays it. Don't be angry, my Lord. Chill out, Moses. It's not that big a deal. Don't get all worked up about it. We want to hear that Aaron gets how bad it is, how evil it is.

Instead, he minimizes the gravity of what he's done. And then secondly, Aaron shifts the blame. You know how prone these people are to evil?

They said to me, make us gods who will go before us. Of course, this is true. They did say that. But it's always someone else's fault, isn't it?

They say, as for this fellow Moses, we don't know what's happened to him. Well, they might not know, but you know Aaron. You know where he is. You know what he's been doing.

You know what he's been doing up that mountain. You know why he's there. Why on earth, Aaron, didn't you tell them? And then get this in verse 24. This is pure comedy gold.

[18:55] No pun intended. Comedy gold, if it weren't so serious. Aaron says to Moses, verse 24, so I told them, okay, give me your gold. And they gave me the gold. And I threw it into the fire and boom, bada bing.

You wouldn't believe it, but guess what came out? This golden calf. No mention of his own activity. No taking ownership for what he has clearly done.

No taking ownership of his part in it. He airbrushes out what he did in verse 4. No mention of him making the idol. No mention of him casting the idol.

No mention of him fashioning it with a tool into the fire and out it pops. Aaron tries to make himself out to be a minor bit player when actually he's in the lead role.

We want him to say, you know what? I messed up, but the buck stops with me. I take full responsibility of what's going on. Instead, we get this lame confession, a non-confession really.

[20:01] It's Genesis 3 all over again. The woman you put here in the garden with me. She made me do it. Blame shifting.

Sin messes up our relationship with God. But another consequence of our sin, another consequence is that it messes with who we are.

It messes with who we are inside. It screws us up inside our mind. It messes up from the inside out. Sin doesn't just anger God.

It corrupts who we are. It corrupts the sinner. So see how they're described in verse 25. The people were running wild. Aaron had let them go out of control.

You might have a translation that has it like this. The people had broken loose for Aaron had let them break loose. Back in verses 8 to 9, if you just glance over there, they're described as a stiff-necked people, quick to turn away.

[21:14] And the way they're being described, they're being portrayed as wild calves or untrained cows. They're stiff-necked because they've come to resemble the calf god they made.

They're acting not like image-bearers of God, but like wild animals. They've become like what they worship. Do you see that?

It's dehumanizing. You know the story of Pinocchio? Well, his nose grows whenever he lies. Why? Because sooner or later, our lies become as plain as the noses on our faces. And the more he lies, at least in the old Disney version, he starts to grow donkey ears and goes, eee, orr.

Well, why? There's a profound truth to this, a profound point to this. The more you let sin run riot, the more you ignore your own conscience, the less human you become.

[ 22 : 22 ] As you violate your God-given sense of right and wrong, sin promises you freedom, but actually you become more like beasts.

Sin corrupts all that it means to be human. It distorts our character. Sin wrecks our relationship with God and it wrecks our innermost being.

The third consequence of sin that we see in the passage, sin destroys our relationships with each other. There's a horizontal dimension as well as the vertical.

And that is graphically portrayed for us here. The Lord relented in verse 14 of wiping out the entire nation. It's not the end of God's people entirely.

But make no mistake, that doesn't mean there's no consequences. Now we can only speculate what might have happened if Aaron had offered a better statement of confession, a better apology.

[ 23 : 27 ] But as it is, Moses stood at the entrance of the camp, verse 26, and says, who is on the Lord's side? Whoever is for the Lord, come to me.

Notice, he doesn't say at first what they were to do. If he'd said at first, come to me if you are willing to kill your brothers, I guess he might not have had so many volunteers and a bit worrying if he had. Can you imagine? They've got their sign-up sheet for the serving rotors, the tea and coffee, kids' work, tabernacle, tear down and set up, killing fellow Israelites.

It's a bit worrying if that's the most popular option. But actually, it's something of profound faith when the Lord says to us, who is on my side?

I have a task for you. And you say, all right, here I am. And maybe the Lord is addressing you very particularly this evening, some of you, asking you, who is on my side?

[ 24 : 42 ] Will you tonight resolve decisively to go all in with Jesus? Growing up in a household of boys, when my mum would ask us, can you do me a favor?

Let me tell you, the automatic response, the automatic response was not, mother dearest, nothing would give me greater joy than to do whatever it is that you ask, whatever the nature of what you are asking, please, mother, ask away.

I'll tell you the automatic response. What is it now, mum? Verse 26, end of verse 26, the Levites, one of the twelve tribes, they step forward, we are on the Lord's side, we will serve the Lord.

All right, go through the camp, kill your own people, some of your friends, some of your neighbors, some of your own family.

It strikes us, doesn't it, as barbaric and violent. I think we're meant to see it as an act of extreme faith.

[ 26 : 02 ] Hard as it is to read of the judgment being dished out like this, we should be even more grieved that the Lord has been sinned against like that.

And I don't know, maybe this was the kind of thing that Jesus had in mind when he says, I've come to turn a man against his father. It might very well have been this passage about the Levites in mind.

C.S. Lewis once said, the hard sayings of Jesus are only good for you if you find them hard. If you read, I must hate my father and mother and think, well, that's a religion for me, where'd I sign up?

You've got issues. But if it comes down to a choice, it's all for Jesus. You have to put Jesus first.

It's all or nothing. It's all or nothing. And being for the Lord means that we are against those who are against him.

[ 27 : 08 ] So that's what sin does to us. It seduces us, it erodes us from the inside out, it strikes at our very relationships with God and with other people. That's what it does to us.

And in our closing section, we're going to see what Moses can't do and why we need someone who can. So when you're little, you look up to your parents and you think that they can do anything.

And at some point you realize that they can't. And if our kids ever thought that of me, I'm sure that they have sussed me out by now. I'm not sure that they ever did.

Up to this point, it looks like Moses can do anything. So just think back if you've been following along with our series in Exodus, think back on all that Moses has done.

He's squared up to Pharaoh, he's summoned the plagues, he's turned his staff into a serpent, he's raised his staff to part the Red Sea, he's received the law, he's struck the rock and water came out of it, and in this chapter he's smashed the tablets and confronted Aaron for his sin.

[ 28 : 15 ] Up to this point, there's not much that Moses can't do. So isn't it all the more striking what Moses at the end of chapter 32, what Moses can't do, one thing that Moses cannot do.

Did you see that when we read it? Look down at verse 30 again. You've committed a great sin, but now I will go to the Lord, perhaps.

Notice that word perhaps. He doesn't know, he isn't sure if it's in his capability. Perhaps, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.

And the Lord says you cannot, Moses, you cannot make atonement for their sin. And that's a Bible word, atonement, break it down, at one meant, bringing man and God back into unity, back into one, making things right between man and God.

One thing Moses can't do, he can't atone for their sins. He says to the Lord essentially, do justice on me instead of them.

[ 29 : 36 ] Blot me out of their book. And you know, the Lord rejects this. Look down at verse 33. The Lord replied to Moses, whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book.

And the time comes for me to punish. I will punish them for their sin. The Lord rejects it. Moses' impulse is along the right track. It points forward. It gives us a glimpse to the one who can do what Moses cannot do.

And in all sorts of ways, Moses gives us a pattern of what to expect in Jesus when Jesus comes. And you can see this Moses pattern particularly clearly in Matthew's Gospel.

So let's think about that. Shortly after Jesus' birth, there's a jealous king who wants to kill all the young boys in the kingdom. Where else has this happened? Back in Exodus chapter 1, Pharaoh fears the Hebrews, so he orders every boy to be killed in the Nile.

[ 30 : 49 ] Moses is spared because his mom hides him in a basket. Jesus is spared because his mom hides them in Egypt.

Just think, both Jesus and Moses left behind a royal existence as the son of the king that they might live with the captive people who needed to be rescued.

After Moses led the people through the baptism of the Red Sea, after the Red Sea, Moses leads them where? Into the wilderness for 40 years. Where does Jesus go? After Jesus' baptism, he's led into the wilderness where he's tempted not for 40 years but for 40 days and 40 nights.

What does Moses do on the mountain? He receives the law for God's people. What does Jesus do? After the wilderness of Matthew chapter 4, we have Matthew 5 to 7, he goes up the mountain, we have the Sermon on the Mount.

He's the new Moses giving the new law to God's people. So when you think about all the similarities or the ways that Moses points forward to Jesus, all the ways Jesus is seen as the new Moses, it's all the more striking, all the more striking.

[ 32 : 07 ] We get to the New Testament that Jesus can do what Moses could not do in Exodus chapter 32. In 1 John chapter 2, he says, I write this letter to you so that you will not sin.

But if anyone does sin, we have Jesus Christ to help us. He is the righteous one. He represents us before God the Father.

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And that's why the writer to the Hebrews describes how Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses.

By dying on the cross to pay for our sins, Jesus makes atonement possible. Because we're forgiven, our smashed up relationship with God is put back together.

Because we can forgive, it's possible to put together our smashed up relationships with each other. In Jesus, our broken humanity is put back together.

[ 33 : 18 ] Moses had proven himself to be an effective and capable leader of God's people. But for the original readers, Exodus 32 would have been a sobering warning about the terrible consequences of sin and the inability of even someone of Moses' caliber to atone for their sin.

And for us, it's a warning too, isn't it? Not to be complacent, not to trivialize our sins, and to put to death our sins.

You know, sin can be like an unwelcome lodger in our lives. You want to get rid of it, but sometimes you just get used to it hanging around. sin. This passage tells us, don't do that.

Just because you got used to the sin doesn't mean that God doesn't care about it, doesn't mean that there won't be any consequences. Nothing in Scripture suggests that God will overlook our embrace of sin.

It has to be dealt with. Either on the cross of Jesus Christ, we are freely and fully forgiven. Or else, as the Lord said to Moses, whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of the book.

[ 34 : 48 ] When the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin. So let's pray and speak to God. Oh Lord God, God, it is sobering to think what a catastrophic agent of destruction sin is.

What a trail of devastation it leaves in its wake. Help us to put to death sin in our own lives. And we pray, gracious Father, full of mercy and compassion, abounding in steadfast love.

We pray that you'd have mercy on us and forgive us for all our sins. We thank you that in Christ Jesus we have a sinless representative who bore your righteous anger against our sin.

Thank you that in him we are freely and fully forgiven. We pray that the Holy Spirit would move us from complacency and that we'd entrust ourselves fully to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank you that you have called us to that privilege of being on your side, on Christ's side. We pray in Jesus' name.

[ 36 : 12 ] Amen. We're going to respond now to God's word first by singing again. Andrew the band will lead us in singing. There is a redeemer. And then we're going to turn to the Lord's Supper.

Amen.