

Burning Hot for the LORD's Glory

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning. Please turn with me in your Bibles to Exodus chapter 32. Originally was going to cover up to 33.6, but I'm actually only going to be able to cover up to the end of chapter 32.
- And I'll finish the rest of that with the next sermon that we are in Exodus. If you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand. We'd love to bring a copy over to you that you can use while you are here.
- Exodus, it's the second book in the Bible. Exodus chapter 32, verses 1 to 35.
- Let me pray now for the reading and preaching of God's Word. Heavenly Father, you are the consuming fire.
- And you burn hot with zeal for the glory of your name. And we do not want to be a lukewarm people.
- [1 : 0 9] But Lord, we recognize that we have failed in our worship.
- We have been lacking in our zeal. And we need your grace. Your forgiveness. Even to be in your presence.
- And so today, Lord, we want to look again in your Word that you might speak to us and show us more of Jesus, your Son.
- Fill our minds and our hearts with his grace and truth. That we might be transformed the way you intend for us to be.
- Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, The people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, Up, make us gods who shall go before us.
- [2 : 5 8] 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. So Aaron said to them, Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.
- So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf.
- And they said, These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.
- And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.
- And the Lord said to Moses, Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them.
- [4 : 0 7] They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it and said, These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And the Lord said to Moses, I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people.

Now therefore, let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them, and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you. But Moses implored the Lord his God and said, O 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?

Why should the Egyptians say, With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people.

Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.

And the Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people. Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets that were written on both sides, on the front and on the back they were written.

[5 : 34] The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, There's a noise of war in the camp.

But he said, It is not the sound of shouting for victory, or the sound of the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing that I hear. And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot.

And he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire and ground the powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it.

And Moses said to Aaron, What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them? And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my Lord burn hot.

You know the people that they are set on evil. For they said to me, Make us gods who 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.

[6 : 47] So I said to them, Let any who have gold take it off. So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf. And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose, for Aaron had let them break loose to the division of their enemies, then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, Who is on the Lord's side?

Come to me. And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. And he said to them, Thus says the Lord God of Israel, Put your sword on your side, each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.

And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day, about 3,000 men of the people fell. And Moses said, Today you have been ordained for the service of the Lord, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother, so that he might bestow a blessing upon you this day.

The next day, Moses said to the people, You have sinned a great sin, and now I will go up to the Lord. Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.

So Moses returned to the Lord and said, Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They admit for themselves gods of gold, but now, if you will, forgive their sin.

[8 : 18] But if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written. But the Lord said to Moses, Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you.

Behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them. Then the Lord sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made.

This is God's holy and authoritative word. You may be seated this time. It's easy to trust God when everything in your life is going your way.

The true test of our faith is whether or not we trust God when things are not going our way. When your business is failing.

When your relationships are unraveling. When your reputation is sullied. When your research or career is stalling. When your bank account is running low.

[9 : 26] When you're feeling insecure and overwhelmed. What does your heart turn to and depend on? That is your God.

Your functional God. That is your idol. If it's not the true God. And my burden this morning and my prayer for you this morning is to contend for the love and allegiance of your heart.

So that when everything is peeled away at the very core of who you are and at the very bedrock of your life. You find God himself. And nothing less than God.

We are all idolaters by nature. And there's only one hope for people like you and me. And it's the main point of my sermon today. Is only the forgiveness secured by Christ our substitute can save us from God's fiery wrath toward idolaters.

And we're going to talk about the folly of idolatry. The fire of God's wrath. And the forgiveness of sin. It's easy to read this account that many of us are familiar with.

[10 : 38] About the golden calf and Israel's idolatry. With a sense of superiority and disbelief. How could the Israelites be so foolish after all that they have seen the Lord God do on their behalf?

But note in verse 1 their uncertain circumstances. What they are not seeing. They're not right now seeing Yahweh intervene with the ten plagues upon the land of Egypt.

They're not seeing Yahweh split the Red Sea right now. This is what they are seeing. They're seeing it says when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain.

That's what they're seeing. What's dominating the Israelites' mind right now is the absence of Moses. The mediator between God and his people Israel.

They're getting anxious. They're getting insecure. Moses is the one who has been speaking for Yahweh the whole time. And interceding on behalf of the Israelites.

[11 : 38] And if there's no one to go before Yahweh on their behalf, how can they possibly complete this journey and enter the promised land? Rather than remembering what they have seen of God and what they do know of God and his promises and his faithfulness, their view, their horizon is entirely taken up by the uncertainty and urgency of the here and now.

What are you seeing right now in your horizon when you look around at your life? What's filling up your view?

In what ways do you feel that God has delayed in fulfilling his promises to you? Are your eyes starting to wonder? Is your heart starting to stray to cling to other solutions, other gods?

We know from Exodus 24, 15 to 18 that the glory of the Lord God dwelt on Mount Sinai, which it said had the appearance of a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the side of the people of Israel.

And we know that before Moses went up to meet with the Lord at the top of the mountain, he put Aaron and Hur in charge of the people so that he could decide disputes among them and judge them.

[12 : 57] And then he entered into the cloud up to the mountain. And it says in 24, 18, that Moses was on the mountain 40 days and 40 nights. So that's a long time for someone to be away by himself without any provision for food or especially after disappearing into what looks like a devouring mountain, fire, smoke, cloud.

Imagine if I told you that I was going on a solitude retreat to meet with God with no timetable for return. And then you had no way of getting in touch with me.

You probably would not wait 40 days before you report me as missing. And the situation is far worse for the Israelites.

It's not hard to replace Sean. It is really hard for the Israelites to replace Moses. The Israelites can't just get another Moses.

This is in the days of the old covenant. Not every believer has the spirit of God in them. Not everyone has direct access to God in Jesus. It says later in Exodus 33, 11, the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend.

[14 : 15] And this was Moses' unique privilege in that time. And he didn't do that. God didn't speak like that with anyone else in Israel. So from the Israelites' vantage point, this is a legitimate crisis.

Not only do they think that they've lost their political leader, they also think that they've lost their access to God himself. They don't have their mediator, their spiritual leader. So he says in verse one, that the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, Up, make us gods who shall go before us.

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. You can see the people's impatience.

The mob has formed to make their demands. Up, Aaron. Get off your bum. Do something about this crisis. Make us gods who shall go before us.

And their misplaced hope and faith is clearly seen in this phrase. The man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt is nowhere to be seen. But remember what Yahweh said, the Lord said in Exodus 20, verse two, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

[15 : 31] It's not Moses who brought Israel out of the land of Egypt. But that's what the people are saying. That Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, he's nowhere to be seen.

The Israelites were not ultimately in this situation oriented toward God through Moses. They were oriented toward Moses. Rather than seeing Moses as a tool of Yahweh, they saw Yahweh as a tool that they can wield using Moses.

There's a difference between relying on God to answer your prayers through people and relying on people. Israel's ultimate trust was not in the Lord and they saw him not as the end and the goal of their lives and of their worship, but only as a means to an end.

This is why they don't hesitate to demand the construction of an idol to take his place. They say, make us gods who shall go before us. After an initial quick reading, it might seem like the Israelites are trying to rewrite history, forsaking Yahweh altogether to turn to a different God that they hadn't known before.

But if you read the narrative carefully, you can see that they're actually setting up the golden calf as an image, an idol, a representation of Yahweh. The Israelites say of the golden calf, these are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

[17 : 00] The word translated gods here is actually the same Hebrew word that's been used to refer to the true God dozens of times already in the book of Exodus. It's the same word that's used to refer to God over 2,000 times throughout the Old Testament.

They're not saying this is a new God that you should worship. They're saying this is the old God, Yahweh, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. This is why after Aaron builds an altar before the golden calf, he proclaims a feast to who?

The Lord. Yahweh. Israelites are not rewriting history. They're saying that the golden calf represents Yahweh. So this then is a violation of the second commandment of the Ten Commandments we saw in Exodus 20.

You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.

They created this image because they thought that it would keep them connected to the Lord when they feared the absence of the Lord due to the absence of Moses. So they reduced God into something tangible, something that they can see and touch.

[18 : 15] But ironically, this creation of the image that they built to represent God is actually idolatry. And Moses conveys that to us by using plural verbs and pronouns throughout this narrative.

The Hebrew word for God, Elohim, when it's used to refer to God is plural, always plural. It's a plural of majesty, as grammarians call it. But because it's referring to the one true God, whenever you use verbs associated with that noun, the verbs are always in the singular.

However, in this narrative, even though that word for God is the same, all the verbs and the pronouns are in the plural. It's like Moses is conveying to us, these Israelites are thinking that they're worshiping the true God.

They're thinking that they have an idol to represent Him. But in reality, they're just setting up an alternate God. They're worshiping multiple gods. They are idolaters because a false representation of God is nothing less than a replacement God.

Psalms 106, 19-20 says of this incident, they made a calf in Horeb and worshipped a metal image. They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass.

[19 : 32] It's dripping with irony and it's tragic in the full sense of that word. Remember that the glory of God appeared like a devouring fire on top of the mountain. He was resting there while Moses is conversing, meeting with God.

So I assume that that's still going on. The glory of God is on top of the mountain. And here they are. They look at that glory in the absence of Moses and then they say, oh no.

I can't deal with that. That's a little too scary. Too powerful. Too wild.

Untamed. Godlike. We need something a little more manageable. Something a little more familiar.

How about a cow? Cows a symbol of fertility. Nations around them who worship Baal depicted him as a cow.

[20 : 44] They give us milk. They give us meat. They give us free labor. How insulting and degrading to the living God.

In what ways are you misrepresenting God? Instead of shaping your views and your lives to conform to who God is and what he has said in his word, are you shaping God remaking God according to your own 21st century secular humanistic western sensibilities?

Do you read God's word to see if your perception of God is accurate? Do you submit to God's word and let it examine you or do you quickly dismiss or ignore anything in scripture that doesn't fit with your own value system or preconception of God?

does your God never contradict you your beliefs never confront you in your sins?

Then you don't know God at all. You're not worshiping God you're worshiping a false representation of God which is idolatry. in what ways have you domesticated God?

[22 : 19] Tamed him? In what ways have you made him less offensive more manageable more familiar more like the gods that our peers worship out in the world and less like the God of the Bible?

the nations surrounding Israel could not conceive of a deity without the aid of images and so they manufactured idols and held special rituals to attract the presence the spirits of the God into that idol at which point they can now control that God have access to him whenever they wanted but God the true God will never suffer such indignity he is the king he is the creator of the cosmos and do we puny humans dare to control him and make him do our bidding?

Are you using God as a means to your end? As a means for gaining status acceptance and respect? Are you using God as a means to get what your heart desires health wealth success God is not a tool for you to wield toward your own ends you are his tool we are his tool to be wielded for his glory it's possible actually seamlessly to blend God with an idol in our sinfulness as the Israelites did so that we have a hard time even detecting these idols in our lives because it's so enmeshed with our belief and worship of God Habakkuk 1 11 speaks of guilty men whose own might is their God do you idolize your own strength your own beauty your own intelligence

Job says to God Job 31 24 to 28 if I have made gold my trust were called fine gold my confidence if I rejoiced because my wealth was abundant or because my hand had found much this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges for I would have been false to God above money can be an idol as Jesus made very clear in his teachings Matthew 6 24 Philippians 3 19 teaches that people's belly can be their God pleasure lust sensuality can be someone's God covetousness is idolatry Colossians 3 5 says so from these biblical examples we can discern what an idol is by asking these two questions one what do you count on and put your trust in other than God really try to ask yourself that question or secondly what do you desire more than

God or what are you devoted to more than God pastor Tim Keller who is a renowned Christian author and he went home to be with the Lord two days ago and he wrote a book entitled counterfeit gods where he helpfully defines an idol this way and I'll quote in full what is an idol an idol is anything more important to you than God anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God anything you seek to give you what only God can give a counterfeit God is anything so central and essential to your life that should you lose it your life would feel hardly worth living an idol has such a controlling position in your heart that you can spend most of your passion and energy your emotional and financial resources on it without a second thought it can be family and children or career and making money or achievement and critical acclaim or saving face and social standing it can be a romantic relationship peer approval competence and skill secure and comfortable circumstances your beauty or your brains a great political or social cause your mortality and virtue or even success in the

[26 : 40] Christian ministry an idol is whatever you look at and say in your heart of hearts if I have that then I'll feel my life has meaning then I'll know I have value then I'll feel significant and secure there are so many ways to describe that kind of relationship to something perhaps the best one is worship often it's the best things in life things that God has created as good that become the most despotic idols in our own lives as some people have put it we humans have a sinful tendency to turn good things into God things and precisely because they are good things our idolatry can be much harder to detect if you look at the way Aaron the Israelites build an altar and then they proclaim a feast in verse 5 and then they rise up early and offer up burnt offerings and peace offerings that bears a striking resemblance to their worship of

Yahweh earlier on in Exodus 24 45 when Moses rose early in the morning and built an altar and the people offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord but this time instead of offering oxen to God they have made an ox their God instead of offering a burnt offering that is pleasing to God they make God burn hot with anger against them with their idolatry but it's the resemblance between true worship and false worship that beguiles the Israelites when I was in high school in an art class I painted Leonardo da Vinci's The Last Supper it was so comically inferior that nobody would ever mistake it for any kind of special art so there's nothing harmful about it but imagine if some artist who is truly exceptionally skilled made a very realistic counterfeit and tried to dupe people into buying it for millions and millions of dollars that's more deceptive it's more compelling because it's so similar when you're invested in a good cause you might idolize the good rather than doing the good for

God without knowing that that's what you are in fact doing it feels so good it feels so right it feels so meaningful it feels so fulfilled but that very thing can be the most tyrannical idol in your life so we have to be vigilant and here's the folly and tragedy of idolatry remember what has been happening all this time we've been on top of the mountain with Moses for like the last month and a half what has been happening over the last seven chapters what is Yahweh been saying to Moses over the 40 days and 40 nights he has been giving him instructions for building the tabernacle because God's not only going to go before them to defeat their enemies and lead them into the promised land because God wanted to dwell among them he wanted to be near them and he wanted to be with them he was not going to be aloof or distant

God was not going to hold them at an arm's length while holding his nose he was going to come and dwell among his own people in a way that no other nation on earth could have ever dreamed of and yet not knowing what's on God's very heart because of their impatience and because of their insecurity they settled for a golden calf they thought an idol of an ox was the best Yahweh had for them it's such a sad reality but that's how so many people around us live it's like when I'm cooking up a delicious gourmet meal rich with omega 3 fatty acids and all kinds of essential nutrients for my third daughter who's two and then she just decides she wants to eat string cheese and

Oreos except that an idol is infinitely worse and eternally consequential whatever your idol may be it doesn't matter how great you think it is do you really think that is God's best for you idolatry is bad yes because it demeans God because it detracts from him yes but it's also astoundingly foolish because it short changes us the living God came and dwelt among us in the flesh in his son

[32 : 39] Jesus Christ the living God indwells all believers by his very Holy Spirit the living God promises to indwell to dwell with us forever in the new heavens and the new earth and would you trade him for that pale shriveled up perishing thing God burns with anger because he burns with love and passion for his people so the folly of idolatry provokes the fire of God's wrath verses 7 to 29 and notice how God reflects back to Moses what the Israelites said in their misplaced faith and hope in verse 7 it says and the Lord said to Moses go down for your people whom you brought up out of the land of

Egypt have corrupted themselves remember that in the preceding passages God has repeatedly said that Israel is my people again and again and God said my people and he has repeatedly said I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt but now here Israel's attempt to bring God near to them down to their level on their own terms in idolatrous ways has actually alienated God even further from them so God reflects what they themselves have said and distances himself from them your people that you brought out from the land of Egypt and he says to Moses in verses 9 to 10 I have seen this people and behold it is a stiff necked people now therefore let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them that I may consume them in order that I may make a great nation of you God is threatening to hit the refresh button to consume all of Israel and restart a great nation with

Moses similar to the promise he made earlier to Abraham in Genesis 12 too but Moses intervenes as an intercessor makes a humble and tactful request of God in verses 11 to 13 he says oh 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 why should the Egyptians say with evil intent did he bring them out to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people remember Abraham Isaac and Israel your servants to whom you swore by your own self and said to them I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and all this land that I promised I will give to your offspring and they shall inherit it forever Moses corrects the

Israelites misplaced faith and hope and reinstates them into right relationship with God says they are your people God you brought them out and Moses appeals to God's unchanging character God's promises that he had made to his people he says the Lord you swore by your own self and you do not change Hebrews 6 13 to 18 says for when God made a promise to Abraham since he had no one greater by whom to swear he swore by himself so when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose he guaranteed it with an oath so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us God's promises are unchangeable for two reasons one he guaranteed it with an oath which is binding cannot change it and two he swore the oath by himself and since there is that and because it is impossible for

God to lie the promises of God which he swore by himself are guaranteed to his people by these two unchangeable realities so Moses understood this and so he appeals to the promises of God God you promised God you swore by yourself by your unchanging name your name is the Lord I am who I am I will be who I will be the same yesterday today and forever that is who you are and by your name you swore that you will do this for your people of course God already knew this and he didn't need to be reminded by Moses but this is God's gracious condescension that he deals with in this way because he ordains that he will work in answer to the prayers and intercession of his saints so we should also approach

[38 : 01] God's throne of grace boldly in prayer and hold God to the promises that he has made that's not being presumptuous that's not to presume upon God that's to honor God because we're taking God at his word and we're expressing our trust in his unchanging character God graciously responds to Moses intercession in verse 14 he says the Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people now this doesn't mean that God changed his mind like we humans do numbers 23 19 specifically says God is not man that he should lie or a son of man that he should change his mind has he said and he will not do it or has he spoken and will he not fulfill it the word there the phrase to change his mind is the same word that's translated relent here in Exodus 32 14 God is not fickle like human beings God is all knowing and unchanging and the word relent here communicates the fact that our prayers really work because

God has chosen to fulfill his unchanging eternal purposes in response to our prayers this relenting of God actually proves that God never changes his mind why because he is fulfilling what he has spoken and promised to Abraham Isaac and Jacob if God really had wiped out the Israelites that would be proof that he did change his mind that he sometimes does not keep his promises in relationships with humans contracts get renegotiated promises get broken but with God that is never the case what has God promised you brothers and sisters I will never leave you nor forsake you Philippians 4 6 7 do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to

God and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your mind in Christ Jesus do you want God's peace that surpasses understanding to replace your fear and anxiety God says pray hold God to that promise tell him God you promised you said have you spoken and will you not do it he will answer your prayer first John 1 9 if we confess our sins he's faithful and just forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness you you can take that check to the bank it will never bounce Moses comes down from the mountain with the tablets of the testimony in his hand and these tablets are called the work of God and the writing was in the writing of God engraved on the tablets in contrast the golden calf is the work of man

Aaron used a graving tool to fashion it but the stone tablets have the very writing of God engraved on it with the finger of God specifically stipulating you shall not make for yourself a carved image which the Israelites are doing so it is fitting that when Moses sees the idolatry and revelry of the people righteous anger seizes him and he throws the tablets out of his hand and breaks them which is a visual representation as the tablets shatter of the shattered terms of the covenant that Israelites have broken a little over a month after they said in Exodus 24 7 all that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will be obedient they said that a little over a month ago and they have broken it all in the first half of this passage we are told repeatedly that God's wrath burned hot against the anger burned hot which is then expressed in the burning up of the holding calf with fire and grinding it in powder and scattering on the water and making the people of

Israel drink it so they can taste physically the spiritual bitterness of idolatry and when Moses confronts Aaron he blames the people and shirk responsibility it's really funny actually the way he does that note the contrast between verse four which is God's infallible commentary this is Aaron fashioned the idol with the graving tool and made a golden calf that's what God thinks happened verse 24 this is what Aaron tells Moses happened I told people to take their gold off they gave it to me and I threw it into the fire and out came this calf who could have foreseen it it's a textbook example of how you should not confess your sins there is no ownership no recognition of the gravity of his sins only casting off blame on other people and this is also ironic and tragic because what else has

[43 : 42] God been telling Moses on top of the mountain that Aaron is going to be the high priest for God's people what is this high priest doing is he making atonement is he making intercession is he repenting and seeking forgiveness of God for his people no he's just pointing fingers that's a sad state of this nation people of God and where there is no genuine repentance sin multiplies all the more it says in verse 25 and when Moses saw that the people had broken loose for Aaron had let them break loose to the derision of their enemies the phrase broken loose can have both literal and figurative meaning there is no discipline and order in the camp so that they have become the laughingstock of their surrounding nations and the enemies broken loose morally they have become loose and promiscuous this was insinuated earlier in verse 6 when it said that the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play the

Hebrew word translated play there is the same word that Potiphar's wife uses in her false accusation of Joseph that he tried to make sexual sport of her and tried to rape her she says the Hebrew servant whom you had brought among us came in to me to laugh at me or to play with me Paul actually confirms this in 1 Corinthians 10 6-8 when he refers back to the Israelites idolatry of the golden calf he cites Exodus 32-6 the people sat down to eat and drink and they rose up to play and then he comments this way we must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did this is why it's all the more appropriate that Moses refers to their idolatry as a great sin three times in this passage since adultery is most often referred to as in scripture as the great sin the people have broken loose in revelry and lechery and in doing so they have been adulterous and unfaithful toward

God himself so in verses 26 to 29 Moses rallies the people of God who is on the Lord's side is there anyone left come to me and all the Levites which is the same tribe that Moses and Aaron belong to they come to him and Moses relates to them a prophetic word of the Lord he says put your sword on your side each of you and go to and throw from the gate to gate throughout the camp and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor the Levites obey and 3,000 men perish as a result and Moses tells the Levites today you have been ordained for the service of the Lord each one at the cost of his son and of his brother so that he might bestow a blessing upon you this day you might be wondering I thought God relented earlier what's happening well it's true that God did relent in verse 14 from destroying the Israelites wholesale but that doesn't mean that

God has atoned for their sin or forgiven their sin there is still punishment left a gracious one small one compared to what they deserved because of God's mercy but the lack of genuine repentance and the lack of a true high priest leads to the zeal of the Levites leads them to being ordained their hands are filled they're given a mandate and a charge to assist the priest in the work around the tabernacle and the temple after this point on if Moses response and the Levites actions seem over the top to us it's because we don't take idolatry as an affront to God's glory seriously enough we don't burn hot against sin we see sin all around us and yet we don't burn against it because we don't burn hot for God's glory and

I think one of the reasons why we don't take idolatry very seriously is because we don't relate to God on personal terms idolatry is not some abstract sin idolatry is personal it's when you take something that rightly belongs to someone and give it to someone else who has no right or claim to it have you ever felt angry have you ever burned with anger when you or your friend that you love or your family member was overlooked for something that rightly deserved maybe an award maybe a job a promotion an admission to college someone else undeserving got it does it not make you angry if you love that person it would make you angry what if someone took your spouse your wife your husband and he or she committed adultery with someone else that is personal idolatry takes what belongs only to

[49 : 23] God what he alone deserves what he has rightly every claim to and then we take that away from him and give to someone who is undeserving of it and if we are burning for the glory of God it should make us burn hot with anger I remember visiting Myanmar in 2009 on a short term missions trip with Hannah and visiting the city of Bagan in that city it's an ancient kingdom what became later Myanmar there used to be 14,000 plus Buddhist temples pagodas monasteries and stupas and to this day there's still over 2,200 temples and pagodas and it's a vast country landscape and you could take in the whole site in one breathtaking view and I remember as I marveled at the beauty of it feeling convicted this should be tearing me up inside that there is so much idolatry that there's so much lostness that so many people have been led astray to worship what is not true and that

God who deserves all their worship and all of their allegiance has been deprived of the worship that he alone deserves that's what Paul felt in Acts 17 16 when he was walking around Athens and he saw that the city was full of idols and he said that his spirit was provoked within him he was inwardly agitated and distressed he was provoked to wrath if we cared about God if we cared about his glory if we cared about his reputation we would be upset do you care that there are nations that are perishing that are worshipping idols this very minute so should we then go out strap the sword to our side visit camp to camp to demonstrate our zeal for the

Lord no why not because if we did we would all die we think we're the Levites in the story no we're the rest of the Israelites all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God all have succumbed to the seduction of idolatry no one deserves to live no one deserves to dwell with God so the last few verses of this chapter tell us that there's still atonement yet to be made Moses says to the people in verse 30 following you have sinned a great sin and now I will go up to the Lord perhaps I can make atonement for your sin so Moses returned to the

Lord and said alas this people have sinned a great sin they made for themselves gods of gold but now if you will forgive their sin but if not please blot me out of your book that you have written but the Lord said to Moses whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book but now go lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you behold my angel shall go before you nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them and the Lord sent a plague on the people because they made the calf the one that Aaron made you could see from the punishment that there was no atonement for sin here Moses is inadequate he's insufficient to make atonement for the sins of God's people and you can see it in his tentativeness as he I can make atonement if you will forgive their sins but if not he's bargaining with

God he's offering himself as a substitute to be punished on behalf of God's people to be blotted out from the book of life and God won't do it because Moses is not worthy to take the place of all of God's people and suffer on their behalf and that points to the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus makes worthy to stand between the gap between God and his sinful people and Jesus is worthy to lay down his life as our substitute so that our names are not blotted off from the book of life can you imagine the horror of that I'm sure some of you have experienced the minor embarrassment of going to a place where you need a reservation or you need to have your name on the list you and it's like you're not on the list you sure you're supposed to be here you sure you were invited it's gotta be in there somewhere can you look again sorry your name's not on there that's the reality that every sinner faces all of us that's the faith that we deserve before the throne of

[55 : 11] God before the judgment seat of God at the gates of heaven God looks at the book of life he looks for your name I don't see it the only reason your name has not been blotted out from the book of life is because Jesus paid for your sin it's because you put your faith in Jesus and Jesus said he who conquers as we saw earlier in Revelation 3 5 in the assurance the assurance of pardon the one who conquers and we know from the book that those who conquer are those who conquer by the blood of the lamb and the word of the testimony that the one who conquers will be clothed in white garments and I will never blot out his name out of the before his angels if you put your faith your whole faith in

Jesus and Jesus alone for your forgiveness of sins and for your salvation that you can boldly approach God's throne with confidence knowing that your name will never be blotted out from that book of life and that my brothers and sister is what we rejoice in what we celebrate and why we worship and that is what we sing about that more than anything else because his gift is God himself so I appeal to you if you don't know this Jesus be washed by the blood of the lamb so that your name is never blotted out let's pray together father it is so good it is so good to be known by you for you say in your word you know us by name it is so good to belong to

Jesus your son to be united with him by faith to be identified with him so that because of his perfect sacrifice on the cross we can have security assurance we can be forgiven of our sins lord help us never to lose sight of this wonderful reality help us to forsake all our idols for there is no one worthy of our worship like you oh lord god and the lamb that was slain and it's in his precious name the name of Jesus we pray amen