

Exodus 32:15-29
Good Shepherd, Beaver Dam
July, 2023

In 1997, I took a trip to Jordan and Israel. While on the tour we stopped at Mt. Nebo and toured the small chapel there and then looked down from the top of Nebo (2,651 ft) and saw the sparkling waters of the Dead Sea below us. It was an awesome sight! We looked in the distance to where Jerusalem was located. Then we looked westward toward the Mediterranean Sea. We could not see the Sea - it was hazy that day. It was great to be able to look over the land that Moses looked over centuries before. I will never forget that sight!

About 3,500 years ago, a large group of people stood near another small mountain called Sinai. These people were the Children of Israel and they saw a spectacular sight. God had freed Israel from slavery in Egypt. After three months of travel, they arrived at Mt. Sinai. It was there that God gave instructions to Moses about the Law. When Moses returned to the people from meeting with God, he told them what God wanted. The people promised, Everything the Lord has said we will do.

Then God invited Moses and Aaron and the elders of Israel to join Him on the mountain for dinner! Imagine being invited to spend some time with God! Moses described it this way the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under His feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. God did not raise His hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank. Time spent like this with God would be impossible to forget!

Three months earlier the people of Israel had witnessed

God's power as He sent ten plagues upon the nation of Egypt. Israel left Egypt freed from slavery and God was leading them to the Promised Land! Israel witnessed God's protection as He led Israel through the waters of the Red Sea and then destroyed Egypt's army in the waters of the sea. After arriving at Mt. Sinai the leaders of Israel ate dinner with God! How awesome! How could Israel ever forget their greatest Friend?

God invited Moses to meet with Him at the top of Mt. Sinai. Moses wrote To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. It must have looked like Moses walked into a burning ball of fire! How could Israel forget such a sight?

Moses spent 40 days and nights with God! The people waited for Moses to return. They became impatient. Instead of giving thanks for what God had done for them, Israel became impatient with Moses and God! Then some people came to Aaron, Moses' brother with a request: Make us gods to lead us. We don't know what happened to this Moses who brought us out of Egypt.

I guess Israel wanted a different, better god! Aaron asked the people to bring him their gold and he made an idol for them to worship! How could Israel not remember the sight of the glory of God on top of the mountain?

How could God's people do this? How could they worship something that Aaron created? How dare they do that! Israel had seen miraculous sights. God was personally guiding them to the Land of Promise! How could Israel treat God this way?

When you think about it, we are not so different than the people of God 3,500 years ago. How many golden calves do

we have in our lives? How many times have we made “things” more important than the praise and worship of God? We have had other gods in our life, too.

Have we forgotten what God has done for us? Have we forgotten all the blessings God has given to us: our country, the freedoms we enjoy, our family, relatives and friends? How is it possible for us to forget what God gives to us daily? Is it possible to forget the spiritual blessings God gives to us? Is it possible to forget the baby Jesus lying in the manger, born to be our Savior? Is it possible for us to forget our Savior nailed to the cross dying to pay for our sins? Is it possible to forget the blessings of our baptism and the Lord's Supper? Is it possible to forget the home being prepared for us in heaven? Can we forget such wonderful gifts from God!

While on Sinai, God had written the ten commandments on two tables of stone. God gave the tables of stone to Moses and then told him the bad news that the people had made an idol! God was ready to destroy Israel! Moses pleaded with God to remember His promises of a Savior made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses begged God to forgive His people. Amazingly, God did forgive.

Moses came down from Sinai, picked up Joshua, and when they came near the camp, Moses saw the people acting like animals before the golden calf. He was angry. Moses would not forget the sight of the people sinning. Moses asked Aaron what he had done and Aaron made one of the worst excuses ever: “The people made me do it. They brought me gold, I threw it into the fire and look what came out!”

I think Moses looked at Aaron and said, “Have you forgotten what God has done for us? Have you forgotten what our God can do to us?”

This is what Moses did: He took the calf they had made, burned it in the fire, ground it to powder, scattered it over the water, and made the Israelites drink it. It is almost as if Moses is saying to the people: “Look how powerful your god is! Look how easy it was for me to destroy it! Take a drink of your god and see how awful he tastes!” The Levites put on their swords and went through the camp killing 3,000 Israelites that day. The people of God saw that God will not tolerate sin! Maybe then the people remembered what God can do!

In this Scripture we see God's anger over sin. Yet, we also see God's amazing grace. God did not kill all the people. He could have, but God showed them mercy. There are consequences for sin. The people would be punished. But not destroyed. In time God would send the Savior to keep His promise and Jesus would take all the punishment for sin upon Himself so that people would not be eternally destroyed. Because of Jesus' blood, we are forgiven. This is why we love God.

Today we saw the people of Israel around Mt. Sinai. We saw the sin of the people. We see ourselves there, don't we? But we also see God's forgiving grace. We believe that Jesus died for all people and we know that Jesus died for me and you! He forgave us everything! God help us to love Him with all our heart. Amen.