

Sermon Mark S. Aites
LESSONS FROM THE GOLDEN CALF
(Outline Points And Material From Virgil Poe)

TEXT: EXOD. 32; DEUT. 9

INTRODUCTION:

1. We return this morning to a dark chapter in Israel's history at the base of Mt. Sinai.
2. Having come out of Egypt by the Mighty Hand of God, in preparation of entering the promised land, Moses ascended the Mountain to receive God's law.
3. After 400 years in Egyptian bondage they were headed for a new life; but unfortunately they had to overcome immaturity and lack of patience.
4. We learn in **Deut. 9:11** that Moses had been on the mount 40 days and nights receiving the law.
5. But the children of Israel grew impatient:
Exod. 32: 1-5 And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.
32:2 And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me.
32:3 And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron.
32:4 And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.
32:5 And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD.
6. But God was angry: in **vs 9** He told Moses He wanted to consume the people in His wrath.
 1. *Consume* - lit., to cease.
 2. God was so upset that He wanted to destroy them; to cause them to cease to exist.
7. Moses interceded for His people, and God relented from destroying this great nation.
 - 1) Estimates: at this time about 2 million people.
 - 2) **vs 28** indicates that 3,000 did perish that day.
 - 3) But even though the vast majority did not perish, God mentioned this event several times in Scripture (**Neh. 9:18; Psa. 106:19; Acts 7:41**).
 - 4) This indicates that this was an event that was significant in that God recounts it time and again.
 - 5) It was that serious of a matter before God.
8. But as we look at the account, there are some needed lessons for us to learn from the construction of this golden calf (**cf. Rom. 15:4**).

DISCUSSION:

I. CROWDS DOESN'T MAKE IT RIGHT.

- A. Aaron had a crowd of people assemble.
 1. It had to be a significant crowd because they provided enough gold to allow Aaron to construct the calf.
 2. Generally speaking, people think that crowds make something right.

- B. When a crowd assembles, the mentality is, “they must be doing something right.”
 - 1. Virgil Poe that said it well, “We are into ‘Crowds.’”
 - 2. We get obsessed with numbers, and large assemblies of people.
 - 3. We make the assumption that a large gathering of people spells success.
 - 4. But is that man’s reasoning, or God’s?
- C. Don’t get me wrong, numbers do have significance; because those numbers represent souls.
 - 1. And Jesus did place great importance upon the value of a soul:
Matt. 16:26 *For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*
 - 2. The very nature of the Great Commission is an effort to save souls, and preferably in large numbers.
- D. Even so, large numbers or crowds does not necessarily mean that what is being done is right.
 - 1. **Exod. 23:2** *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil...*
 - 2. A large crowd assembled at the calf, but it was in error.
 - 3. **Illus.** Boston Movement -International Churches of Christ: Their philosophy is that “the end justifies the means.”
 - 1) In other words, obtaining members at any cost to acquire large numbers.
 - 2) When we are given to use any means or methods to boost our attendance, then we have departed from God’s way.

II. GIVING PEOPLE WANT THEY WANT FAILS.

- A. **32:1a** *And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us*
- B. Sometimes people reason that we obtain the people’s favor when we give them what they want.
 - 1. Israel wanted new gods, and a new style of worship.
 - 2. **vs 19** we learn that they were dancing, and **vs 25** informs us that they were naked; or as the NKJV renders it, they were “unrestrained.”
 - 3. This was a no-holds barred type of worship; anything goes.
 - 4. This was a result of Aaron giving the people what they wanted.
 - 5. And too, conspicuously absent here was preaching; no sermon to rebuke them of their sins.
 - 6. I imagine there are those today who would silence the voices of those who faithfully proclaim the word of God.
- C. **Gal. 1:10** *For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.*
- D. **2 Tim. 4:2-4** *Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*
4:3 *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;*
4:4 *And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*
 - 1. We have gotten too much into the mode of thinking that we need to please people in order to get them to be Christians.

2. It is not pleasing them that we need to be concerned about, but pleasing God.
3. Some even have the mentality of shopping around for a church that will meet their needs (more appropriately their desires); and will teach what they want to hear.
4. Ours is not to please man, but God.

III. 'WONDERFUL' WORSHIP EXPERIENCES MAY NOT BE RIGHT.

- A. For those Israelites who indulged in that revelry in the name of worship, it was a religious experience that "was better felt than told."
- B. **32:5-6** *And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD.*
32:6 *And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.*
 1. Note the syncretism in this passage, referring to the fact that these Israelites had blended their false worship with the worship of God.
 2. While Aaron had constructed the calf, and even an altar before it, he still proclaimed the next day as a feast to the Lord.
 3. **vs 6** even notes the people bringing burnt and peace offerings.
 4. They just change things to make it more meaningful to them.
- C. So often today, there are those who complain about worship:
 1. They are tired of the old-outdated style of worship of their fathers.
 2. What they want is to turn the worship service into one that allows them to have "a worship experience."
 3. They want to change the manner and style of worship to enhance their feelings in the worship service.
 4. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with feelings and emotions, provided of course that we do not change things just to appeal to them.
 5. Where man gets into trouble is when he changes the worship of God to suit his needs, and his feelings, rather than to be pleasing to God.
 6. Some will bring in instruments of music, or turn the worship service into pandemonium. Screaming, shouting, stomping, clapping, dancing, swaying, etc., and they take the reverence right out of the worship service.
 7. **John 4:24** *God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*
 8. What should please us is doing that which is pleasing to God.

IV. FUN MUST NOT BE CONFUSED WITH WORSHIP.

- A. The Israelites involved were dancing, sinning, being immoral, basically doing whatever came to mind.
 1. In a very warped sense, they were having fun -- "joyful, exuberant activity."
 2. They basically were entertaining themselves.
 3. **Exod. 32:6** says that Israel *rose up to play*.
 - 1) *Play* - Hebrew means, "to laugh outright, and by implication, to laugh, to mock, to play."
 - 2) But their play was earthly, sensual, and devilish (cf. **James 3:15**).
 - 3) They chose to go after idols, which of interest, was forbidden by God, and was part of the law they were about to receive.

Exod. 20:3-5 *Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*

4 *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.*

5 *Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God..*

- B. Too many today seek to make their worship services entertaining.
1. What transpires is more of a performance than a worship service designed to honor God.
 2. Too many it is like going to a show, or to a concert to be entertained.
 3. And we know too well that our society is deep into entertainment.
 4. We need to remind ourselves that we do not assemble for our entertainment, or for a social gathering of friends.
 5. While we enjoy our fellowship, we come for the express purpose of worshipping God.
 6. And He needs to be approached with reverence, honor, and respect.

Psa. 111:9 *...holy and reverend is his name.*

Heb. 12:9 *Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?*

Heb. 12:28 *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.*

12:29 *For our God is a consuming fire.*

V. MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE IS NOT WORSHIP.

- A. As we look at the overall picture at Sinai, the children of Israel got what they wanted.
1. They made their gods in the image that they wanted.
 2. They allowed their sensual lusts and desires to dictate their worship.
 3. While they may have got what they wanted, in doing so, they sold their souls, made fools of themselves, and mocked the true and living God.
- B. At some point we have got to realize that giving people what they want is not worship.
1. When we alter the worship service...
 - 1) ... change our singing praises to God
 - 2) ...alter the Lord's Supper
 - 3) ...or change the manner in which we give
 - 4) ...or preach the philosophies of men, we are not worshipping God!
 2. When we take this road, we sell out our souls and cease pleasing God.
 3. Listen again to what Paul said: **Gal. 1:10** *For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.*

CONCLUSION:

1. Excitement, feelings, giving people what they want: these are the things that some are doing today.
2. The purpose of this lesson is to recognize that just because something is offered in worship, it is not necessarily pleasing to God.

3. Jesus said in **John 4:24** that our worship must be *in spirit and in truth*.
 - 1) Spirit - This deals with our hearts, our attitude, our approach to what we are doing.
 - 2) Truth - as God has directed in His Word.
4. When we try to please men, like Israel, it can lead to blasphemy and idolatry.
5. Lives were lost at Sinai; and even more sad is the realization that souls are lost for eternity.
6. Your soul is much too precious to take the road of those who worshipped the golden calf.