**The Enemy Within**

Exodus 32:1-35

**Good Morning Beloved,**

* John Donne – “Poor intricated soul! Riddling, perplexed, labryinthical soul.”[[1]](#footnote-1)
  + A boy and his brother push the squeaking iron gate open as they go up to the old abandoned house.
    - From a distance they see the windows are cracked.
      * As the approach the front door, they notice that the handle is so large that it will require both of them to turn the knob together.
  + As they enter the foyer, the moonlight bounces off the cobwebs.
    - The flashlight they brought to explore the old mansion pitifully illumines the rooms.
      * Shadows abound.
* Kris Lundgaard observes… “The haunted house scares us because it hides something unknown and deadly. It has countless coat closets, cabinets, false walls, trapdoors, attics, basements – corners and shadows where the monster lies in wait, licking its chops…. You have a haunted house within you: your heart.”[[2]](#footnote-2)
  + Donne’s poem and Lundgaard’s prose are the point of our passage today.

**The Reading of God’s Word** – Exodus 32:1-35 (P. 72 in the Pew Bible)

*32:1 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. 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.” 2 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.” 3 So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. 4 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!” 5 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.” 6 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.*

*7 And the Lord said to Moses, “Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. 8 They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’” 9 And the Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. 10 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.”*

*11 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? 12 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. 13 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.’” 14 And the Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.*

*15 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. 16 The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. 17 When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, “There is a noise of war in the camp.” 18 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.” 19 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. 20 He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it.*

*21 And Moses said to Aaron, “What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?” 22 And Aaron said, “Let not the anger of my lord burn hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. 23 For they said to me, ‘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.’ 24 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.”*

*25 And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies), 26 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. 27 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.’” 28 And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell. 29 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.”*

*30 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.” 31 So Moses returned to the Lord and said, “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. 32 But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.” 33 But the Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. 34 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.”*

*35 Then the Lord sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made.*

**The Preaching of God’s Word**

1. The Forgetfulness of Idolatry (vs. 1-6)
   1. The book of Exodus not shifts.
      1. For several chapters, we have heard about…
         1. The rules and laws that are to govern the people of God (Ex. 19-24)
         2. The specific details regarding the Tabernacle and its furniture (Ex. 25-27)
         3. The wardrobe of the priests and their consecration for service (Ex. 28- 31).
      2. These chapters are a dream for those who love to study case law… for those who aspire to be a fashion designer… or those who dream of woodworking.
         1. But for many who read these portions of scripture… we quickly miss that these chapters establish God’s rule and reign among his people in love.
      3. So as we shift back to the story…
         1. We would be right to anticipate something like what God’s Word recounts when King David lead the Ark of the Covenant so that the benefits of the Covenant would be celebrated.
            1. Just as 2 Samuel 6:14-15 recounts….

*“And David danced before the Lord with all his might, wearing a priestly garment. So David and all the people of Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with shouts of joy and the blowing of rams’ horns.”*

* + - 1. In 2 Samuel there is a joyful celebration because the Lord dwells with His people.
  1. In our passage there is a community shout… but it is against the LORD.
     1. While Moses has been on the mountain receiving these instructions from the Lord… the people have forgotten the LORD.
        1. They turn to Aaron, Moses’ brother, and say…
           1. Vs. 2 - *Up, make us gods who shall go before us.*

Forgetting… forsaking… fleeing the LORD who…

Lead them with pillars of cloud and fire (Ex. 13:17ff)

Manifested His presence on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19

And revealed Himself to the elders with such vivid kindness that the people cried out, “*We will do everything the Lord has commanded. We will obey*.” (Ex. 24:7).

Now like a newly married man who flirts with the maid of honor… the people abandon their Covenant God.

And they attack his servant.

* + - * 1. Vs. 2 - *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.*”

There is both a tip a hat… as they acknowledge Moses brought them out of Egypt… and an overt dismissal… “THIS Moses…”

* + 1. Then almost like in the collection for the Tabernacle (Ex. 25:1ff)… Aaron leads the people to forget their Covenant Identity (Ex. 19:5-6) and build an Idol (Ex. 20:4-6).
       1. The mindset of idolatry directs the people to abuse God’s gifts (vs. 4), desecrate God’s place (vs. 5), and give way to debauchery[[3]](#footnote-3) (vs. 6).
  1. Application: Luke 12:15 - *And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”*
     1. Is there anything or anyone that you have put your trust in this year other than the LORD?[[4]](#footnote-4)
  2. Transition: What does idolatry do to us? What does it produce?

1. The Affront of Idolatry (vs. 7-14)
   1. Verses 7-10 shows the effects of idolatry.
      1. Note the pronouns here… as the LORD God ALMIGHTY speaks to Moses.
         1. *7 And the Lord said to Moses, “Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. 8 They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’” 9 And the Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people.* 
            1. Here the eternal promises of life and joy seem to be undone.

The end of Exodus 29 stated…

*“I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. 46 And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.”* (vs. 45-46)

* + - * 1. Now God gives the people over to their idolatry.

They are not “MY PEOPLE”… they are “YOUR (meaning Moses’ people).

* + - 1. In Romans 1, the Word of God declares, “*they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions.”* (vs. 25-26).
         1. Here is the affront…

The exchange the Glorious Creator for a Golden Calf.

AND exchanged the image of God as the resemble a beast.

Lie a child who exchanges a $100 bill for two pennies…

Idolatry leads to two clear declarations…

“MY Son” (Ex. 3:23) become “this people” (vs. 9)

“The holy nation” (Ex. 19:6) becomes “a stiff-necked people[[5]](#footnote-5)” (vs. 9).

* + - 1. The Apostle Paul writes of those who follow this path of Idolary…
         1. *“…that those who practice such things deserve to die…” (Romans 1:32).*

That is exactly what our passage in Exodus makes explicit.

* + 1. *10 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.”*
       1. The entire goal of the Exodus hangs in the balance…
          1. The nation of Egypt could not slow down for one second God’s purposes….

But the enemy within… the remaining indwelling sin… the black tar of the soul… justly deserves the white-hot, pure, and just wrath of the Living God.

* 1. But in that Moment… a mediator speaks.
     1. A man stands in the gap for those on the brink of destruction.
        1. And the pronouns switch…. As Moses intercedes for God’s people.
           1. Verse 11 recounts God’s work in the PAST as “You delivered YOUR people… with great power and with a mighty hand”.
           2. Verse 12 tells of God’s reputation in the PRESENT as the nations look on how you relate to “YOUR people”.
           3. Verse 13 looks forward to the FUTURE as the Covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be realized to YOUR servants.
     2. Moses pleads for the people on the basis of GOD’S glory rather than giving way to having a new nation make for HIS glory.
        1. From Ryken – “When ‘faced with a dictator’s dream,” writes Everett Fox, ‘the cloning of an entire nation from himself – he opts for staunchly defending the very people who have already caused him grief through their rebelling, and who will continually do so in the ensuing wanderings.’ Given the choice between serving himself and saving others, he puts others first. This is the mark of a true man of God: He chooses God’s greater glory over his own personal good.”[[6]](#footnote-6)
  2. Application: 2 Peter 3:17 - *You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.*
     1. Are you reminding yourself of the only sure foundation of your soul?

1. The Fraud of Idolatry (vs. 15-20)
   1. When Pharaoh and his dreadful army were swallowed up in the Red Sea the only appropriate response was singing and dancing.
      1. The shepherd from Midian becomes a poet.
         1. Ex. 15:1 - *I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.*
      2. His sister, the prophetess, becomes Miriam, the tambourine toting dancer as singing erupted…
         1. Ex. 15:21 - *“Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.”*
            1. Those ransomed by grace are a people of song… we are a people who give ourselves over to celebration…

Wither that be on pilgrimage to Zion (Psalm 121)

Or in the prisons in Philippi (Acts 16:25)…

We are a people who sing and dance (Ps. 150:4) for the LORD has done great things and we are glad (Ps. 126:3).

* 1. But the problem with idolatry is that is counterfeits true joy.
     1. It masquerades as authentic.
        1. Idolatry is fraud… and therefore deceitful.
           1. Moses and Joshua hear the distinct noises of the people.

The sounds are not battle cries (Ex. 14:8)

Nor laments (Ex. 12:30)

But singing and dancing before the golden calf (Ex. 32:18).

* + 1. Moses in righteous anger, holy lament, and just zeal destroys the calf… grounds it into powder… and makes the people drink it.
       1. Just as the people broke their word… Moses dramatically breaks the tables.
          1. The people then consume the works of their own hands as they drink the bitterness of sin.
  1. Application: 2 Kings 23:21ff – “*… king (Josiah) commanded all the people, “Keep the Passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant.” … Moreover, Josiah put away the mediums and the necromancers and the household gods and the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might establish the words of the law that were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord. Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him.*
     1. John Owen in *On the Mortification of Sin* – “Do you mortify? Do you make it your daily work? Be always at it whilst you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you.”
  2. Transition: Beloved, there are several reasons to kill our sin.
     1. First, it strips us of all power… promises big and we forget where real power comes from( Is. 41:28).
     2. Second, it strips us of all dignity… we resemble what we worship… we become stiff-necked… more like animals than men (Rom. 1:23).
     3. Next, it strips us of wisdom… we become fools (Jer. 10:8).

1. The Foolishness of Idolatry (vs. 21-24)
   1. Pause: What is the most bizarre excuse you’ve ever given to justify something you had done wrong?
      1. Hearing a pastor talk about planting an oak tree over the church’s sewer clean out line… over time the mighty oak caused all sorts of sewage issues in the church…
         1. I remember thinking… no excuse is possible!!
   2. Moses confronts his brother, Aaron, by saying,
      1. *“What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?”*
         1. Don’t you love how kind AND candid that sentence is.
            1. He addresses the issue and yet the way it is phrased conveys self-control in the midst of righteous zeal.
   3. Aaron falters again.
      1. Just like Adam in the garden (Gen. 3:12), he blames his companions (vs. 22).
      2. Just like Saul when Samuel was delayed (1 Sam. 15:24), he blames the situation and the people (vs. 23)
      3. THEN in utter foolishness, he attributes the golden calf to the FIRE (vs. 24).
         1. The irony is we spent last week hearing how Bezalel and Oholiab were filled with wisdom and ability to work with gold… now we hear of clumsy etchings of fire.
   4. Application: Psalm 139:23-24 - *Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*
      1. Confess specifically specific sins…[[7]](#footnote-7)
         1. Situations matter… relationships matter… yet we must say…
            1. God, I am bitter.
            2. God, I am impatient.
            3. God, I am unkind.
            4. God, I am afraid of other’s opinion.
      2. For Aaron though, there is still a blatant blindness.
         1. The failure of this High Priest will bring judgment on the people… but another will point to their salvation.
2. The Freedom from Idolatry (vs. 25-35)
   1. For clarity Beloved, every Sunday is about life and death.
      1. Every sermon is a plea to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-21).
      2. Every gathering is a summons to taste and see that the Lord is Good (Ps. 34:8).
      3. Every service of worship is call to let the redeemed of the Lord say so (Ps. 107:2).
         1. The consequences of rejecting the Lord… worshipping images put forward by the Evil One… and nurturing the Enemy Within… is DEATH.
            1. When Moses cries out, “Who is on the LORD’S SIDE?”

The Levites respond… and those who don’t die.

* 1. Amazingly, all deserved to die… for the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).
     1. 3,000 of the 2,000,000 fall.
        1. Then the passage shifts….
           1. Moses, the godly man, pleads for his name to be blotted out of God’s book so that the people would be forgiven.
        2. Moses is willing to undergo death and damnation, so that the people would know life and salvation.
           1. Yet God refuses.
     2. WHY?
  2. Application: 2 Cor. 1:21-22 - *And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.*
     1. There reason why Moses’s self-sacrifice is not sufficient is because there would be a better mediator for God’s people.
        1. Jesus Christ is the BETTER Servant who delighted in His Father’s will with perfect submission (John 6:38).
        2. Jesus Christ is the BETTER HIGH PRIEST who did not give way to the fear of man, but accomplished the work His Fahter gave him (John 17:4).
        3. Jesus Christ is the BETTER REFORMER who guides us in paths of holiness and gives us hearts of flesh so that obedience is a joy (Eze. 36:26).
        4. Jesus Christ is the BETTER CORRECTOR as he makes known the kindness of God that leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4) and the severity of God in the punishment of hell (Matt. 18:9).
        5. Jesus Christ is the BETTER SAVIOR.
           1. Here is the mediator who stood in the gap between an idolatrous and adulterous people and an infinite and awesome God.

For on the cross, Jesus Christ was treated as a beast of burned for our stiff-neck rebellion.

On the Cross, Jesus Christ was regarded as a criminal for our drunkenness with the world.

On the Cross, Jesus Christ died… so that you would never have your name blotted out of the book of life.

* 1. Beloved, the reason we gather for thanksgiving every Sunday is because Jesus Christ was faithful as a SON (Heb. 3:1-6) so that we would be free from the Enemy within.
     1. By the powerful working of the Holy Spirit, believe upon Christ and know that he will deliver you from evil (Matt. 6:13).

1. Conclusion
   1. John Donne – “When God's hand is bent to strike, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; but to fall out of the hands of the living God is a horror beyond our expression, beyond our imagination.”[[8]](#footnote-8)
      1. John 10:27ff - *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.”*

**Prayer from *The Book of Common Prayer (Ed. 1928)***

ALMIGHTY God, Father of all mercies, we, thine unworthy servants, do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all men. We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may he unfeignedly thankful; and that we show forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

**Benediction – Numbers 6:24-26**

*The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*

1. In Kris Lundgaard’s *the enemy within: straight talk about the power and defeat of sin* on page 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *The enemy within*, 36 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Hebrew term that is translated “…and rose up to play” in verse six is better rendered “amuse themselves” and is elsewhere in the scriptures conveying the verb “fondle” (Gen. 26:8). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Heidelberg Catechism, in question 95, rightly expresses the forgetfulness of idolatry in terms of trust. “Q. What is idolatry? A. Idolatry is having or inventing something in which one trusts in place of or alongside of the only true God, who has revealed himself in the Word.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Philip Graham Ryken notes “The phrase ‘stiff-necked’ describes a beast of burden that is too stubborn to wear its master’s yoke or do what its master says” (*Exodus*, 933). He pointed concludes, “Stiff-necked people always think they’re right and never admit they’re wrong. They refuse to listen to good spiritual counsel” (p. 933). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ryken, *Exodus,* 936 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Westminster Confession of Faith’s Chapter on repentance summarizes many key thoughts about this important doctrine including, “As every man is bound to make private confession of his sins to God, praying for the pardon thereof; upon which, and the forsaking of them, he shall find mercy: so, he that scandalizeth his brother, or the Church of Christ, ought to be willing, by a private or public confession, and sorrow for his sin, to declare his repentance to those that are offended, who are thereupon to be reconciled to him, and in love to receive him.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. No. 76, preached at Sion to The Earl of Carlisle and company (c. 1622) - LXXX Sermons (1640) as quoted [here](https://libquotes.com/john-donne/quote/lbx9e8l). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)