

# Exodus 32 Sermon

## Introduction

Have you ever wondered if God is actually going to meet your needs? Maybe you've come to a fork in the road in your life, a decision about work or family that has huge implications and your wondering if God will actually give you the guidance you need on the subject. Maybe it's financial needs, the horror of losing a job, not being able to provide for yourself or your family. Maybe its relational needs, maybe it's emotional needs, will God give you what you need to be emotionally healthy? Whatever time it's been for you, have you ever wondered in these times. "Is God going to meet my needs?"

It's pretty common to have these doubts in God, and we're not the first ones to have them. And here in Exodus 32 we see the Israelites having the very same doubts about God.

## 1) Idol worship

In the opening verse of the chapter we see why the Israelites build and worship their idol and it's because they doubted that God and Moses would provide for their needs.

Listen as I read verse 1:

"When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him"

The Israelites committed idol worship because they needed a guide and Moses was taking too long. They doubted that God and Moses would be able to provide for their needs anymore and so they built an idol and worshipped it instead.

And in this worship **they broke** the first 2 commands given in the ten commandments from chapter 20.

- 1) "You shall have no other God's before me"
- 2) "You shall not make for yourself an idol"

**They broke** the first 2 commands that they made a blood oath to obey in Exodus 24 saying "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey".

**They broke** the loving covenant they made with God within forty days because they doubted God would provide for their needs.

And this idol worship has consequences.

## 2) Idol consequences

In fact it has dire consequences, because the 10 commandments are not only commandments, they are a covenant – a covenant is like a marriage, it's love made stronger by law. These commandments are like the vows that bind Israel to God and God to Israel.

And in Exodus 24:7-8 – Israel unanimously confirmed and legally agreed to keep the 10 commandments. And this confirmation was sealed with the sprinkling of blood which was a symbol that showed that keeping this covenant between man and God was worthy of their lives. And on the flip side it shows that breaking the covenant would make them deserving of death.

And In Exodus 32:19 we see a physical representation of what Israel had done with the covenant when they worship their idol. When Moses see's the idol worship, in his anger he throws the stone tablets that testified to the covenant to the ground and they shattered into pieces.

The covenant that God had made with Israel had been shattered into pieces and it was broken by man, not by God.

And we see in verses 9 and 10 that Idol worship deserves death. God says

**“I have seen these people” The LORD said to Moses, “and they are a stiff necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.”**

Israel deserved to be destroyed, after all they had just broken the two most significant promises they made in their covenant with God. And so God would not only be righteous to destroy them but obligated by the covenant to destroy Israel.

This makes Israel's greatest need a mediator. A mediator who would step in on their behalf and provide atonement for their sins. Someone to make amends between Israel and God. **Someone to act like a lawyer in a court room who stands before the judge and defends the accused.** And that's exactly what God had already provided for them in Moses.

And in verses 11-13 Moses does step in and he provides a “way out” for Israel.

While the destruction of Israel is the appropriate response, Moses reminds God of His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Israel to make them into the great nation which was Israel. And Moses points out that God's name which is only worthy of honour may be mocked by the Egyptians if he destroys Israel.

Essentially he's saying “although Israel has done an evil thing, don't make your own name mocked by evildoers because of our sinfulness, remember your promises”.

And so we have two attributes of God pit against one another which leave us wondering how will god respond?

Will God be righteous and destroy Israel at the expense of his faithfulness to his promises?  
Or will God be faithful to his promises at the expense of his righteousness?

### 3) Gods response

God's response is threefold:

- 1) Firstly in verse 14 **God relents** of his threatened disaster.
- 2) But He still punishes Israel by giving them a **lesser punishment** in verses 27-29 when the Levites kill only some of the unfaithful in the Israelite camp and then again in verse 35 we see another lesser punishment with the plague that struck them.
- 3) And thirdly God promises a future punishment for sin in verses 33-34 saying "when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin."

And it's in this promise of future punishment that we realise that the tension of God's righteousness and his faithfulness has just been postponed.

And we're left wondering again "when will God in his righteousness rightly wipe out Israel? And when he does will he forget his promises?"

And with this, the shadow of death is just looming over Israel and in fact it's looming over all who worship idols. ourselves included because they aren't the only ones who break these commandments.

Exodus 32 shows us more than just a once off event in history.

It shows us that the human heart is inclined to turn away from God.

Just look at how quickly Israel turned away from God. The very people that God had just saved out of Egypt with many miraculous signs and wonders turned away from him after having made a covenant to obey him only 40 days earlier. Israel should have trusted God would provide. But they didn't.

And we ought to trust in him to provide for all of our needs too but history tells us that whether we are a believer or an unbeliever our hearts affection constantly turns to things other than God to satisfy us and meet our needs. Whether we have financial needs, relational needs, guidance needs or emotional needs we turn to other things than God to try and meet that need.

We ought to rely on God for these needs because he's dependable.

We ought to trust in Him for these needs because he's trustworthy.

We ought to put our faith in Him for these needs because he's faithful.

And yet, We doubt his dependability and we trust in other things to provide for our needs.

Things like:

- money
- family

- achievement
- work and career
- sex and romance

These are often the things we turn to in our times of need. These are the things we turn to when we doubt God will provide for us.

They become the things we set up to serve because we doubt God will provide for our needs. And this leads to sin.

Take for example adultery. The main reason we would look at porn or cheat on a spouse in one way or another is because we may think that God can't provide for our relational needs. That God won't give us the comfort, or security or approval we're looking for. And so we turn instead to relationships, sex and romance for our needs. And turn that into the idol we worship with our time and energy even though God commands us not to.

Or take for example stealing. When push comes to shove the reason we steal is because we think God doesn't know our needs or won't provide for our needs. And so we turn to other people's money or possessions for the security and comfort that we should have found in God.

Or lastly what about lying? I think we lie most often to make people approve of us and our actions and this is because we desire the approval of others more than we desire the approval of God who tells us not to lie.

Every sin can be linked to idolatry and we have all sinned. The conclusion is that we are all guilty of idol worship and so we stand with Israel under the shadow of death, waiting for God's punishment to rain down on us.

And yet there is hope. In this passage we see a glimmer of hope that there will one day be an atonement for sins.

Look at verses 30-34 with me as I read and note how Moses sees atonement for sin happening:

The next day Moses said to the people "You have committed a great sin. But 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! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now please forgive their sin – but if not, then blot me out of the book 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"

Amongst God's promise for a future punishment Moses see's the need for a human sacrifice in order to atone for humanities sinfulness. He says: **But now please forgive their sin – but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.**" Moses offers himself up as a sacrifice in the place of Israel. But God doesn't let him and instead

God says **"when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin"** and that time was in Jesus. Israel and ourselves included both need someone to provide atonement for our idolatry, and this perfect atoning sacrifice was the ultimate mediator - Jesus.

In Jesus we see that tension between God's righteousness and faithfulness relieved.

Where Moses could only delay God's righteous punishment, Jesus atoned for it by dying the death we deserved on the cross.

**The apostle Paul explains this in Romans 3:25 saying:**

**"God presented him(Jesus) as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished"**

and Where Moses could only remind God to be faithful to his promises, Jesus fulfilled them.

**2 Cor 1:20 - For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ.**

And so in Jesus we see God's righteousness fulfilled through his atoning sacrifice and we also see his faithfulness fulfilled as he is the "yes" to all of God's promises.

You see,

Jesus gave up his life so that we could live.

Jesus gave up his needs so that we could have our needs,

Both our ultimate need for atonement, and also our worldly needs.

After all if we know God has already met our need of atonement at the cross, we can be confident he will meet all our other needs.

Pauls says in **Romans 8:32**

**"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"**

in other words, If God was willing to give up his own life for us in Jesus, then he's obviously willing to give up anything and everything else in order to provide for our needs.

When we realise that in the ultimate mediator Jesus, God has given us our greatest need, which is the atonement for our idolatrous sin.

Only then will we be so comfortable in our relationship with God that we won't seek relational comforts in anything adultery has to offer.

Only when we see that God held nothing back from us and was willing to give up his own life for us in Jesus will we be secure enough to trust in his provision rather than stealing our own.

Only when we see what Jesus has done for us will we be confident enough in the approval of God that we won't seek the approval of men through lies.

In Jesus, God has shown us that we have no reason whatsoever to doubt him because he can and has provided for us all our needs in such a way that we can now forsake our idols and pursue God instead.

So the next time we're doubting whether God will provide for our needs, and we're tempted to find our needs met in something else.

We need to remember Jesus, remember how his death on the cross has provided for us our greatest needs and has shown us that God is willing to give up everything in order to make sure our needs are met.

<Pause>

Let me pray.

Lord God we are sorry for all the times in which we doubt your provision for us and turn to something else instead. Please forgive us for our idolatrous hearts.

Lord we thank you that you came down as Jesus, lived a perfect life and died the death we deserved so that we could be forgiven and have eternal life. Please help us to live in light of what you've done and to turn away from idols to live for and serve you, the one true God.

In Jesus name we pray,  
Amen.