

Message 5: The Tablets were Broken

4.10.2022

Palm Sunday

Message 5/51

Exodus 32:7–29 (CSB)

7 The LORD spoke to Moses: "Go down at once! For your people you brought up from the land of Egypt have acted corruptly.

8 They have quickly turned from the way I commanded them; they have made for themselves an image of a calf. They have bowed down to it, sacrificed to it, and said, 'Israel, these are your gods, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.' " 9 The LORD also said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and they are indeed a stiff-necked people. 10 Now leave me alone, so that my anger can burn against them and I can destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

11 But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God: "LORD, why does your anger burn against your people you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and a strong hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians say, 'He brought them out with an evil intent to kill them in the mountains and eliminate them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger and relent concerning this disaster planned for your people. 13 Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel—you swore to them by yourself and declared, 'I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and will give your offspring all this land that I have promised, and they will inherit it forever.' " 14 So the LORD relented concerning the disaster he had said he would bring on his people.

15 Then Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides—inscribed front and back. 16 The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was God's writing, engraved on the tablets.

17 When Joshua heard the sound of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a sound of war in the camp."

18 But Moses replied,

It's not the sound of a victory cry

and not the sound of a cry of defeat;

I hear the sound of singing!

19 As he approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses became enraged and threw the tablets out of his hands, smashing them at the base of the mountain. 20 He took the calf they had made, burned it up, and ground it to powder. He scattered the powder over the surface of the water and forced the Israelites to drink the water.

21 Then Moses asked Aaron, "What did these people do to you that you have led them into such a grave sin?"

22 "Don't be enraged, my lord," Aaron replied. "You yourself know that the people are intent on evil. 23 They said to me, 'Make gods for us who will go before us because this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt—we don't know what has happened to him!' 24 So I said to them, 'Whoever has gold, take it off,' and they gave it to me. When I threw it into the fire, out came this calf!"

25 Moses saw that the people were out of control, for Aaron had let them get out of control, making them a laughingstock to their enemies. 26 And Moses stood at the camp's entrance and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me." And all the Levites gathered around him. 27 He told them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says, 'Every man fasten his sword to his side; go back and forth through the camp from entrance to entrance, and each of you kill his brother, his friend, and his neighbor.' " 28 The Levites did as Moses commanded, and about three thousand men fell dead that day among the people. 29 Afterward Moses said, "Today you have been dedicated to the LORD, since each man went against his son and his brother. Therefore you have brought a blessing on yourselves today."

Introduction to a challenging passage:

A. It is easy for most of us to read this passage and have a lot of questions:

1. First, why does God give up so quick on Israel?
2. Why is God so angry?
3. Why is Moses so angry?
4. Why do the Levites kill a bunch of people?
5. How can this be the same God we worship in the New Testament who is doing these sorts of things (I'll answer that one better next week on Easter Sunday).

B. What we do with challenging passages is really important to our faith.

1. What we will see today is that not only is God not harsh, He isn't harsh enough.
2. In fact, God's reactions are so much more loving and gracious than anyone of us would act.

1. Israel deserves to die for her sins.

A. While Moses is spending time with God, Israel is committing adultery and idolatry.

1. Israel is breaking every commandment, every promise, and every shred of trust that has been given in the recent days.
2. From God's position, He sees what Moses doesn't.
 - a. He sees their sin and their heart.
 - b. God calls them stiff-necked.

B. Stiff-necked refers to a "beast of burden that is too stubborn to wear its master's yoke or do what its master says."

1. This is the first time this phrase is used in Exodus.

2. But it will become one of the primary ways God describes His people in the Prophetic books.

C. Why does Israel deserve to die?

1. So what if they got drunk?
2. So what if they had a million-person sex-party?
3. So what if they sacrificed sacrifices on a false-altar to an image of an Egyptian God.
4. Sure, these are all bad, but doesn't God forgive?
5. Isn't God love?

God's anger, Moses' anger, and the killing of some of the people stemmed because Israel broke 3 important concepts.

2. [First, Israel broke a covenant.](#)

A. Just 50 days before, Israel had agreed to a Covenant with God.

1. They heard the terms, summarized in the Commandments.
2. They agreed to them "In all things we will do and be obedient."
3. Then they offered sacrifices to celebrate and to seal the covenant.

B. Israel's behavior and choice to follow a false-god broke this covenant.

1. Part of the covenant ceremony involved the cutting of an animal.
2. They would cut it and sprinkle the blood on the parties, signifying "if I break this covenant" then I should die in like manner.

C. When Moses comes off the Mountain, and he asks:

Exodus 32:26–29 (CSB)

²⁶And Moses stood at the camp's entrance and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me." And all the Levites gathered around him. ²⁷He told them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says, 'Every man fasten his sword to his side; go back and forth through the camp from entrance to entrance, and each of you kill his brother, his friend, and his neighbor.'" ²⁸The Levites did as Moses commanded, and about three thousand men fell dead that day among the people. ²⁹Afterward Moses said, "Today you have been dedicated to the LORD, since each man went against his son and his brother. Therefore you have brought a blessing on yourselves today."

1. What about the Levites killing their neighbors?
2. The key to understanding this is the Covenant Israel had just entered.
3. Moses is asking "who will help God keep the Covenant and its terms."
4. When the Levities stepped forward, they declared "we will fulfill the terms of this Covenant that we agreed to."
5. This obedience resulted in this tribe being entrusted with the articles of the Covenant by assisting the priesthood.

D. We should never use this passage to justify murder or genocide.

1. What we need to glean from this passage is the seriousness of God's promises and Covenant.
2. God could have killed them all, but He doesn't.
 - a. He could have also "overlooked" their sin.
 - b. But if He had, he would have violated His own covenant and would have been a liar.
3. Because God keeps His Covenants, we know He also keeps His promises.

3. Second, Israel broke not only a Covenant but also a Marriage.

A. Over the past few months, I've been coming across more and more the theme of "wedding" and our "marriage" to Christ.

1. It's a theme I hadn't seen before.
2. But just like when you buy a car and notice that EVERYONE drives that car now, when the Lord started showing me the theme of Jesus and Groom and the Church as Bride, and the great wedding, I see it everywhere.
3. Apparently, I'm not alone and this isn't a new theme:
 1. One writer declares:
 2. From the perspective of the biblical prophets, what happened at Mount Sinai was nothing less than a divine wedding.¹
4. This makes sense when we read books like HOSEA, that is an enactment of Spiritual adultery.
 1. Or all the passages in the prophets that talks about "unfaithful Israel".
 2. Or then in the New Testament, how John the Baptist declares the Bridegroom is coming.
5. Here's the question: If Israel was committing adultery, then when was the wedding?

[Thus says the LORD:] "Therefore behold, I will allure her [Israel], and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her.... And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt." (Hosea 2:14, 15)

The word of the LORD came to me [Jeremiah], saying, "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, 'Thus says the LORD,' I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the LORD, the first fruits of his harvest." (Jeremiah 2:1-2)

I passed by you again and looked on you; you were at the age for love. I spread the edge of my cloak over you, and covered your nakedness: I

¹ Pitre, Brant James. Jesus the Bridegroom (p. 9). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

pledged myself to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the LORD God, and you became mine. (Ezekiel 16:8, NRSV)

B. It makes sense that the events at Sinai was not only a Covenant ceremony but also a wedding.

1. This was where "YHWH became their God, and Israel became His people." (Sounds like wedding language).
2. Furthermore, after the ceremony and the promises were made, the leadership went up the Mountain and had a dinner in the presence of God.
3. Sounds kind of like a wedding banquet, and a foreshadowing of the future Marriage Supper of the Lamb, doesn't it?

C. If we view the events at Sinai has a wedding, a choosing of one spouse and one God, then what Israel does was spiritual adultery.

1. This helps explain why God was so mad, and even why Moses was angry.
2. Left to a few days by herself, Israel bound herself to another god in the image of a calf.
 - a. Israel gave her love to this god.
 - b. Israel gave her hopes to this god.
 - c. Israel gave her worship to this god.
3. Israel was unfaithful, and God was the spurned and jealous lover.

D. By understanding this passage through the lens of marriage, then God was more than just to leave Israel and to start fresh with a new marriage.

1. God could have started over again with Moses, and still kept His promise.

2. God would have been right and correct to have gone another direction.
3. But God didn't.

E. Here is what this tells us:

1. God's love for you is greater than you can imagine.
2. The enemy lies and says you are too far gone to be saved.
3. But GOD is merciful and gracious.
4. And His love endures forever.

4. Lastly, they broke God's Heart.

Exodus 32:15–16 (CSB)

¹⁵Then Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides—inscribed front and back. ¹⁶The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was God's writing, engraved on the tablets.

A. Anyone who has ever written something knows that part of you is inscribed in the writing.

1. Whether I'm writing sermons or research papers, there is part of me in that writing.
2. The writer of Exodus provides great description of the Tablets in Moses' hands.
 - a. Inscribed front and back.
 - b. They were the work of God.
 - c. The writing was God's writing.
3. This was by no means the kind of writing that shows up on digital downloads or purchases that we click at the bottom just to move on.
 - a. When I bought my house last year, all my paperwork was digital.

b. I'll be honest, I don't think I read everything on those papers.

c. I wanted the house, so I digitally signed the paperwork.

B. The Law represented more than words but the heart of God.

1. As Moses comes off the mountain, in a moment of anger, he breaks the tablets of stone.

2. The breaking of the tablets signify the breaking of the covenant, the marriage, and the heart of God.

C. When we break God's heart, excuses don't matter.

1. Moses asked Aaron "what did these people do to you to lead them to this."

2. But no matter what Aaron would have said, it wouldn't have undone the damage.

3. Romans 1 tells us that all of humanity is without excuse before God.

a. We might justify our sin.

b. We might relabel our sin to sound more appealing:

a. Adultery becomes an "indiscretion".

b. Theft becomes "financial mismanagement" or "misappropriation of funds".

c. Gossip becomes "just tellin it the way I see it".

c. Humanity is really good about reclassifying our sin.

4. Yet, the reality is "sin known by any other name is still sin".

5. All sin requires the grace and mercy of God.

5. Even in the midst of great sin, there is still grace.

A. Moses sought the favor of God.

1. Next week, we focus on Moses ascending up the Mountain to “atone” for our sin.

2. But this week, you need to know, “Sin cannot take us where grace cannot reach us.”

3. No one is too hopeless or too far gone for God to save and redeem.

B. Romans tells us “All have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God”.

1. We all stand condemned before the just God.

2. We all deserve eternal death.

3. Yet, God in His mercy has made available forgiveness and redemption.

C. Last week, I preached hard on sin.

1. I can preach hard on sin and hard on grace because I know that, through Jesus, we find forgiveness of all sins.

2. Because of Jesus, I don’t have to atone for my own sin.

3. Instead, I can live for Jesus instead of against Jesus.

Apply: We live in a world that champions sin and vilifies righteousness.

A. But that is nothing new.

1. This is not a new phenomena.

2. So what are we to do?

B. Call sin what it is.

1. Michael Hyatt once said a mistake is pushing the gas when you meant to hit the break.

2. We can’t call our sin anything less than sin and expect to receive God’s forgiveness.

C. Then, receive forgiveness.

1. Stop thinking that your sin is too great or too costly to forgive.
2. Stop walking in condemnation and accept the gift of God already.

D. Then live for Jesus.

1. This is easier said than done.
2. But God has sent His Spirit to help you live for Jesus.
 - a. The sinful nature helps you live against Jesus.
 - b. The new nature, the Holy Spirit, helps you live for Jesus.
3. The Holy Spirit will help keep you from worshipping Golden Calfs.
 - a. The Holy Spirit will keep you from rising up to “play”.
 - b. The Holy Spirit will empower you to stand up for righteousness when even your own family is celebrating sin.
 - c. The Holy Spirit will lead you away from the pull of sinful influences and towards Godly influences.
4. Living for Jesus may not always be easy, but it’s always doable.

Prayer:

This morning, some of us need to confront our sin by confession and repentance.

Some of us need empowerment to live for Jesus, because that old nature wants to show its ugly head and you know you aren’t called to that.

All of us need empowerment to live for Jesus.