

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

There is something in each of us that kind of enjoys seeing someone else crash and burn after they've screwed up. Isn't that true? You know the guy who flies past you on the interstate going well over the speed limit. Then 10 minutes later, you pass him as he's sitting on the side of the road with a state trooper looking in his window. And you're thinking (or saying), "Yeah! That's right! You had it coming buddy!" Or the guy at work who's always talking inappropriately about women, including those in the office. He brags about his affairs. Then one day you hear his wife is divorcing him, and you think, "Yeah! He had that coming!" Or the cocky player on the football field who is obviously very stuck on himself, and is continually talking smack and taunting your team. Then one play he twists his ankle and he's out of the game. And you think, "Yeah! Glad to seem go. He had it coming."

These attitudes I'm expressing here are not attitudes that God would smile upon. But this attitude is especially dangerous when we think about some people: "I'm glad they're not part of our church. They don't belong. They don't deserve God's forgiveness. What they get in eternity... well, let's just say they've got it coming."

I think if we're honest, we'll all have to admit feeling something like that at one time or another. Maybe it was the person living an openly sinful life now. Or maybe it was the person who had a very checkered past.

In our sermon today, I pray God through his Word will change our hearts and minds when it comes to the lost. When we remember three characteristics of God in particular, it will remind us of what we really deserve and what God gives us in spite of ourselves. It will also then demonstrate our attitude toward those who maybe don't yet have what God has freely given to us.

Our story today is found in Exodus 32:7-14. Here's the setting. About 500 years earlier, God had made a promise to Abraham that he would have countless descendants who would be a great nation. He promises he them a great piece of land... a great country where they would live. He promised them most importantly a Savior who would not only be a blessing for that chosen nation of Abraham's descendants, but also a blessing to every nation on earth. And as if those promises were not enough, God also demonstrated his special favor on them. When they were enslaved, 10 catastrophic plagues convinced the Egyptians to free them. When they changed their mind and pursued them, God parted an entire sea so his people could safely pass. Then those same waters drowned the army pursuing them. They were miraculously fed with manna and quail.

Now, they had come to a special mountain: Mt. Sinai. God showed his presence on that mountain with terrifying smoke and thunder. Then Moses went up. He went up to receive from the very hand of God, the 10 commandments revealing God's will for his people. The Israelites waited below. 40 days they waited. A month and half Moses left. A month and half since the smoke and thunder.

And what do they do? They make for themselves an idol. They coerce Aaron, the High Priest and Moses' brother, to collect gold from the people. Coins, jewelry... anything gold. They melted it down and formed it in a calf made of gold. They put it on a pedestal and started

worshipping it. They announced that this calf was the god that led them out of Egypt. They threw a wild party. Just like that they abandoned their God who had done so much for them.

God's not stupid. He knows all that they are doing. So God says to Moses: **“Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’”** God knows exactly what they've done and explains it all to Moses. You can't pull one over on God. Is that an obvious statement? Yet we seem to think we can. We sometimes boldly sin, sometimes we quietly sin, supposing that God can't see us. How foolish. God sees it all. And not just the outward actions. He sees and knows the thoughts of our hearts as well.

I think this part of the text is here so that we understand clearly: God is always just in his judgments. God doesn't fly off the handle. God isn't impulsive or hasty to judge. God knows. He knows every detail. Every detail of our hearts and lives.

What's his reaction to his knowledge of these particular details? **“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.”**

You know, I think that maybe people's understanding of God in the Middle Ages was a little off. God was the angry and stern judge. That was not an accurate understanding of God. But I wonder if modern day America, our understanding of God is off too. I think we tend to think of God as a grandfatherly, partially senile milktoast sort of God. He's soft and loving, so a little sin is okay. That's wrong. God is not like that. In this verse I just read we see God's true nature. This stiff-necked and rebellious people infuriated God. His anger burned against them. He thought to destroy them. And if he had done so, he would have been entirely just! No one could have faulted him! No one could have said that he acted unfairly.

Understand this: when it comes to holiness and perfection and uprightness and purity: God is passionate. It's what he loves. It's what he demands. And when he doesn't get it, he is rightly offended and furious.

At first glance, we have a hard time understanding the Israelites. After all God did for them. After all the miracles they saw. With all those special revelations and promises in hand... they abandoned him for a gold calf! How could they? Is a part of us saying, **“Destroy them God! They have it coming!!!”**

Not so fast. Are we really any better? We're not. God has richly blessed us, both body and soul. He gave us life. He redeemed our life with the blood of his Son. Yet what have we done? Look at your obedience to him just in the last week? Is it perfect? What's your excuse? We have none!

We may not have formed a golden calf that we worship. But plenty of times we have worshiped the green paper idol... money. Many times we have placed our judgment and our decisions above God's Word. We dare to impose our sense of what's right and wrong over his to justify our sinful behavior. And we all have our personal demons. Our personal temptations that we struggle with day after day, falling into that same sin again and again.

Make no mistake: God is furious! His anger at Israel's idolatry is his anger over our idolatry. Before we hastily identify others who don't deserve God's love or mercy, take a harder look at your own heart and life and understand that you are no more deserving than anyone else.

Now, what else do we learn from our text. Some good news: **God is patient.** God could have struck the Israelites dead. He spoke of doing so. But he waited. He listened to Moses as Moses pleaded for mercy for the people. And God waited. He didn't deliver the punishment that was rightly deserved.

Friends, God is patient today as well. Look at the world we live in. Why hasn't God destroyed it yet?! Look at your own heart and life. Honestly: why hasn't God destroyed you yet? God is patient. God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

But understand this. Patience is one attribute of God that is *not* eternal. God's patience will run out one day. That's when Judgment Day comes. That's when God says, "Enough is enough! Now all will be made right, and all people held accountable!" Praise God that he's patient! But patience isn't enough. We need something more if we will have hope this day.

God was rightly angry. But God was patient and waited for Moses to speak. And here's what Moses said: **"Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "O LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.**

Fascinating story! What did Moses say to God? Well, first not what he *didn't* say! "Lord, please reconsider. The loss of life in wiping out a nation would be staggering." "Lord, these people are bad, but it could be worse! They're really not that bad. The heathen nations are far worse. Let's focus on their good points, shall we?" "Lord, they really can't be blamed. Think of how they suffered in Egypt! These people were slaves. They don't know how to handle their freedom yet. Cut them some slack."

Each of those reasons focuses on the people. They assume there is something inherently good or savable in them and appeals to God on that basis. But Moses didn't do that. Why? Because there was nothing good in them! No, instead, when he speaks to the Lord, he talks about God and what HE is like. The reason for sparing the people must be found in God, not in the people. So he remembers what he knows about God. "God, your name is on the line here! What will the Egyptians say if word gets back about the destruction of these people? (2) God, remember your promises... the ones made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Then the Lord relented.

Friends, our only hope in the face of sin is to do what Moses did. Our salvation is all about who God is, not about who we are. We are sinners who deserve destruction. But God made some promises and God sent his Son to rescue us. God's name is on the line now as his promises have been publicly proclaimed. If you are to be saved, it's not because of who you are. Not because of your performance. Not because of your promises to change and improve. No, God's salvation will only be delivered because of who he is: THE LORD. Independent, unchanging, always loving, desiring to show his mercy.

One final point to wrap this all up. We started today talking about our attitude towards others. People who have it coming. Get that attitude out of your heart right now. We had it coming from God... but he spared us for Jesus' sake. Now carry that new attitude in your heart toward the lost. Just as Moses did, intercede in prayer for those who are lost. Does someone

seem particularly like a lost cause? Pray for them even more. Remind God of his promises, love and mercy. And ask him to spare that person. Then share the same thoughts with that person. Show them *God's passion* about holiness and purity which results in anger over sin. Show them God's patience which allows you to even have the conversation... but a patience which won't last forever. Share with them God's promise of forgiveness through Christ Jesus. Share what you know about his holy life and his innocent death on the cross for our sins. And don't forget about the glorious resurrection which guarantees our resurrection!

Don't shake your head at those who live disobediently. Don't wag your finger at them. Bow your head Fold your hands and pray for them. Then ask God how you might be the answer to that prayer. Go... this week... and show them their sin. Show them their Savior. Perhaps God will relent and not bring on these people the disaster he has threatened. May God give us hearts filled with compassion for the lost... ALL of them! Amen.