Exodus 32:7-14 14 Then the Lord changed his mind about the disaster which he said he would inflict on his people.

If you don’t mind we are going to just jump into this text. Our theme: **A LESSON ON GOD!**

Most of you here are familiar with this history but let me just lay it all out for you. Moses had been called by the Lord to be the one who would deliver his people Israel from their Egyptian slavery. Moses came back to Egypt and with his brother Aaron they gave the message to Pharaoh, “Let God’s people go.” Pharaoh resisted and with that God himself carried out a series of plagues to help Pharaoh and even Israel grasp that he is the true and only God.

The tenth plague was the event we call the Passover of God. The angel of death passed over Egypt and if you did not have the blood of the lamb on your doorpost or were not in a house eating the Passover Meal then the first born in that household, human and animal died. It was this plague that finally moved Pharaoh to free God’s people and let them go.

Of course, Pharoah, thinking himself a god, quickly determined to reverse his freedom and pursued the Israelites to bring them back. He ran into the Lord. The pillar of cloud that guided the people came between the Egyptian army and the Israelites, black on one side and light on the other to help God’s people. In the meantime, God parted the waters of the sea and the Israelites were escaping across that sea with a wall of water on both sides and dry ground at their feet. Finally as the Israelites were completing the crossing, God lifted the cloud and the army of Egypt foolishly tried to follow. They were drowned.

So far, what you are learning is of the power and wonder of God. You have heard how God visibly and physically affected this world to deliver and save his people. I want this fact in your head because of what our text is going to tell us.

Not long after this crossing of the sea, the people are brought to Mount Sinai, where they are told to prepare to meet with the Lord and become the recipients of the covenant of God that was to be their guide and way of life. After preparation, the people heard the voice of God as God spoke his Ten Commandments to them and again demonstrated his majesty and might in an awesome, visible and audible way. The response of the people is fear and they beg Moses not to let God speak with them again because they were afraid they would die. It is then that God calls Moses to go up on Mount of Sinai where Moses was to directly receive the laws and Covenant of God for God’s people.

And here is where the history of our text comes in. It is true, that Moses is gone for 40 days, but at the same time it is equally true that what took place happened rather quickly so that by 40 days the idolatry was full blown. I like to ask, “How long did it take to come up with the idea of the golden calf? How long did it take to gather the jewelry of the people and make it into this golden calf?” When you think of it in this way, then you realize that perhaps as quickly as just a week or two after hearing the voice of God and seeing the wonders and marvels of God on Sinai the people began this journey to idolatry. That’s where our text comes in.

**7The Lord spoke to Moses: “Hurry down, because your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves! 8They have quickly turned from the way which I commanded them. They have made a calf for themselves out of metal and have worshipped it. They have sacrificed to it and said, ‘This is your god, Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt.’”**

Note what is said here. This is not a case of mistaken identity. The Israelites deliberately make a golden calf, an image of an Egyptian god and they have begun to worship it. They heard the voice of God tell them not to do such things, not to worship other gods or to even have images of what they called god and yet that is what they do. All of this 3 months after they get freed from Egypt. They have had three months of seeing the glories and awe of God. They have had three months where God guides, provides and protects them. Not very long ago, they were even visible witnesses to the truth and reality of this God as they surrounded the mountain and God himself spoke to them. It is God who says, **“They have corrupted themselves!”** It is God who testifies against them, **“They have made a calf for themselves…they have sacrificed to it and said, ‘This is your god, Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt.’”** This is deep and despicable sin. This is a rejection of the very God, whose wonder you have witnessed.

The next words of our text are just as revealing. **9The Lord said to Moses, “I have seen these people, and they certainly are a stiff-necked people. 10So now leave me alone, so that my anger can burn hot against them, so that I may consume them and make you into a great nation.”**

I don’t think there is a person here who doesn’t understand the way God might be feeling. He is angry with these people. He is disappointed with these people. I would even venture to say that perhaps we could declare, God is broken-hearted over what these people have chosen to do. But I want us to be careful. Careful because while there are things here that are told us we have to grasp that these things are really “anthropopathisms.” That means God is ascribed human feelings and emotions. He does that because that is the only way, the best way that we can kind of, sort of get a handle on what is going on. God is far above and beyond us. Not a single human can grasp the fullness and complexity of God. Not a single human can fathom the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God. So God tries to help us. He reveals himself in human fashion. He helps us grasp him by using what we know. But again, understand that this is still a limited view and understanding of God.

At the same time I also want you to grasp that these things have been given to us, these grasps and glimpses of God are there for us. As we study the Scripture we get a pretty good grasp of who and what God is. Most important, we learn that when God says that I am this way and it is that way, we are to believe and trust that this is true. When God says, he will judge and condemn the unbeliever…that is true. When God says faith in his Son is the only way…that is true. When God condemns sin as evil and other works as good…that is true. When God tells us that we can know him because of Jesus and the Word that has behind it the wonder and marvel of Jesus…that is true. We don’t change what God has revealed because we can’t completely grasp the awesomeness of God. We accept that what God has revealed is exactly what we should know and wrestle with because it is the path and truth of salvation.

What is most startling in the words we are looking at right now is the Lord’s pronouncement on his people: **“I have seen these people, and they certainly are a stiff-necked people.”** The implications of the words of God for this people is tremendous. To be a “stiff-necked” people is speaking of our hardness, our stubbornness, and our reluctance to hear, learn and implement the good. These people have seen God, been the direct recipients of his power and wonder and yet they don’t give to God his simple due, the honor and respect, the awe and love that is to be God’s.

At one time I would have railed and ranted about the horror of what these people have done, but as I have grown in God’s Word and the truth of our lives, I realize that we, each and every one of us, are these people. Stubborn when it comes to God’s marvel. Reluctant to hear and learn the wonder and awe of God. Perhaps the real truth is, we are often hard pressed to implement the good and wonderful love of God that is found and experienced in our lives. Yes, I have come to grasp that we are like these people of Israel in our very own lives.

Isn’t it true that we have before us the wonder and victory of Jesus? Isn’t it true that we have been delivered by the true Passover Lamb, freed from the slavery of sin and granted the status of children of God and heirs of eternal life? Have we not heard the voice of God in his Word? Have we not seen the power and majesty of God in his Word? Have we not been the recipients of his grace and love? We are so blessed, so benefitted of the grace of God in our lives and yet, we are just like Israel.

Why isn’t this chapel filled right now? Why is it that on any weekend of worship only half of us are here? And if you are one of those who misses a lot of church, right now you are going through the wonderful excuses you have for the golden calves of your life. We curse and swear, lie and deceive. We gossip and backbite our fellow humans. We whine and complain that God just isn’t doing right by us, because we think we should have better coming. And although God’s Word clearly lays out the privilege and joy of enduring hardship to the glory of God all too often we are shaking our fist at him and spouting off how God has deserted and failed to be good. I could go on, but I hope you get my point, we too are a “stiff-necked” people before the Lord our God.

In truth, God had every right and every bit of justice on his side, so much so that God could have destroyed those people and still been holy and pure. But I want you to notice that God does no such thing. God allows his servant Moses to intercede and plead for these souls. Listen to what is said. **11Moses begged the Lord his God and said, “O Lord, why does your anger burn against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12Why should the Egyptians say, ‘He brought them out for an evil purpose, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn back from your fierce anger and change your mind about inflicting disaster on your people. 13Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self. You said to them, ‘I will multiply your seed like the stars of the sky, and I will give all this land that I have spoken about to your seed, and they shall inherit it forever.’”**

Moses, acting just like a mediator, just like a priest, yes just like one who is to intercede, appeals to God. He appeals to God based on the promises and word of God. He appeals to God that God not act out of justice and righteous anger but that God consider, not the people directly before him, but the people of the past who heard, believed and followed. The people of the past who loved God because they knew that God first loved them. Lord, you made promises. You granted grace. You chose them knowing what they were because you Lord wanted to grant to them and through them a Savior.

Just so you know. God could have destroyed these people and made a great nation from the descendants of Moses and still been declared a keeper of the promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Remember Moses was from these descendants. Nope, something unique and wonderful is happening here. The question is, do you see it?

Because then the most remarkable verse is found. **14Then the Lord changed his mind about the disaster which he said he would inflict on his people.** Hear it again…**14Then the Lord changed his mind about the disaster which he said he would inflict on his people.**

God forgave. God set aside his righteous justice and wrath and he forgives these people. Get this, they did not change. For that matter they are still in the camp worshipping the idolatrous calf. They haven’t even been confronted with their sin. Yet God forgives. He forgives because of his compassion and care. He forgives because of his love and his grace which allows him to set aside his anger, his perfect, holy and just anger in order to forgive his people.

Here is the lesson we are to learn. To learn of the goodness, the grace and the love of God. God does not deal with them, or us, as we deserve. God in his holiness, forgives because He is filled with grace.

Oh, and God forgives because of Jesus! Don’t forget that. Listen to Romans 3:25b-26 **“God did this to demonstrate his justice, since, in his divine restraint, he had left the sins that were committed earlier unpunished. He did this to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so that he would be both just and the one who justifies the person who has faith in Jesus.”**

Do you get that? That passage tells us that God did not punish, but set aside his anger because of Jesus. He knew Jesus would take the punishment. He knew Jesus would bear their guilt and sin and that in Jesus they could be declared righteous, holy and redeemed of God by grace. Instead of rightly destroying this whole group, for the sake of those who believed in the Savior to come, God relents from his anger and grants his grace and forgiveness.

This is our God. We see even back in the days of Moses his grace in action. Moses was serving as a type of Christ, a picture of what the real Christ would do for us. Jesus intercedes for us. Jesus is our mediator and our great High priest, who perfectly atones for and pleads on our behalf. All of this so that in Jesus, because of Jesus, whether he is the one who is coming or the one who has come, we have been forgiven of God for our “stiff-necks”.

Thank you Lord for your grace. Thank you for showing that this grace was even in action with your people of Old. Grant that we have faith in Jesus and that in Jesus we grasp the forgiveness that is ours, the grace that calls us your children and heirs of eternal life. Our God is a God of grace in Jesus! Amen.