

AS ONE AT 10

15th November 2020

INTRODUCTION

As I get older, I get more stick from my family for my lack of memory...I'm not too bad with birthdays, but I did once commit the heinous crime of forgetting my wedding anniversary – to be fair, it was a good number of years ago but believe me, it wasn't a good moment and I haven't forgotten it since (and neither has Adrian!).

Our Bible reading today from Exodus 32 begins like this... “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 up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.”

The people of Israel have the memory of a goldfish!! Only 40 days or so earlier when Moses had told them all God's words and laws they had repeatedly cried... “Everything the Lord has said we will do.” – But now, since Moses has not yet returned from the mountain they have once again forgotten who God is and what he has done for them.

They are already ignoring his commandments to worship only Him and not only that, they describe Moses as ‘this fellow’ as if he was a man they barely knew, rather than God's mouth piece for his people who stood against Pharaoh, and led them away from slavery and death... It seems crazy -

Sadly, it seems that even though God can take the Israelites out of Egypt, you can't take Egypt out of the Israelites. Their hearts are still back in Egypt with their powerless gods, and the golden calf (or bull as it was more likely to look like) was not dissimilar to the Egyptian bull-god Apis, a symbol of strength and fertility in the surrounding cultures.

The people had so quickly forgotten their commitment and love for the one who had saved them. Instead,

THEY ARE QUICK TO FORGET

God says in vs 8, “They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and made themselves an idol case in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it, and have said, these are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”

No wonder God is angry! The people have been so quick to replace him with something they can see and touch, rather than putting their trust in God, who

yes is unseen but has spoken and acted to save them, bless them, kept his promises and provided for them in miraculous ways. And instead of bringing their sacrifices to God with integrity and love, grateful for all he has done verse 6 tells us that once they have brought their sacrifices they run wild, indulge in revelry engaging in immoral orgies which would have frequently accompanied pagan worship at that time. They are dragged back to the patterns of the past rather than remembering that they have been saved from them.

Aaron too forgets - Leaders are just as prone to forgetting Gods saving power as the rest of us. Aaron takes a lead in building the calf, and later in the Chapter, somewhat hilariously lies to Moses, blames everyone else for his actions and suggests that he “threw the gold into the fire, and out came this calf!” – suggesting it just appeared rather than the fact that he made the choice to fashion it deliberately into the god that the people called for. Only this week, I read an article concerning a worship leader who had an affair and left his wife and family. Leaders are vulnerable too, and can forget their saviour, and instead follow their own desires rather than his.

We can all too easily forget our Saviour, forget his goodness, and replace our worship of Him with something else. We are so quickly pulled away by the world and tempted to bow down to the false gods of success, and control, beauty and pleasure. There is a constant battle between the world’s way and Gods’ way and its easy for us to go with the flow with everyone else, forgetting God’s love, his priorities for our life and Jesus sacrifice for us.

Last weekend we celebrated Remembrance Day. A huge effort is made every year across the world so we will not forget the sacrifice of men and women who fought in all conflicts past and present. It’s an important time to remember sacrifices that were made. But surely, how much more important is it for us to remember the greatest sacrifice of life ever made – the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who died in our place, to save us!

When we forget Him, we may not make a golden calf, but we often let the world’s priorities supersede God’s. We often pour our energies into our own homes, comfort and well-being before that of others. We often alter our view of God that he might become the kind of God we would like Him to be, meeting our needs and wants. We often want him to change others, but resist allowing Him to transform our own lives and so mould him into a God that we are comfortable with and doesn’t challenge us too much. In doing so we forget that there is no one like him, his power, his might, or his holiness or his ability to save.

After Israel had built and worshipped their golden idol, God had both the right and the power to wipe them out for good, but he didn’t. Why?

Because GOD'S GRACIOUS HEART IS QUICK TO FORGIVE

God's heart has and is always to save people...it was never God's purpose to destroy the Israelites.

Why would he send Moses back down the mountain at all if he had meant to wipe the people out? Moses was sent because he was the one God had chosen to save the people. And so Moses comes down, destroys the calf, witnesses the depravity of God's people, calls them back to the Lord and prays.

God wants Moses to pray on behalf of the people - to mediate for them. Not to make excuses for them or justify their actions, but to be the one to appeal to God for them. And Moses in obedience intercedes, not trying to convince God to do something he didn't want to do, but instead telling God what he wanted to hear. And God, in his love and gracious mercy relents.

In all their disobedience and forgetfulness, God does not abandon his people. Yes, he is angry at their sin and yes, there are severe consequences. But he is a God of grace. In chapter 33, he sends them an angel to be with them, he remembers his covenant to them and promises them that they will receive the land. The tent of meeting becomes a place where Moses meet with God and the people could see a pillar of cloud come down from Heaven whenever Moses and God were talking together. Not only that if anyone wanted to know God's will they could approach the tent, talk with Moses and he would speak to God on their behalf. – By God's grace there was still a way for them to connect with God.

In our forgetfulness of all that Jesus has done for us, God's grace continues We don't have to stay at a distance from God. We don't have to consult with someone else (a priest) to come to God on our behalf. By his grace God has given us access to himself through the permanent presence of His holy spirit with us. His heart is so gracious that we come always come to him in repentance for our forgetfulness and rebellion trusting that He will forgive us and renew our relationship with him.

As his rescued children, we can talk with him face to face as a friend speaks to a friend. We can share with him our worries and fears, and talk over the things that concern us. We can confess our sin, confident that we will be forgiven. We have an intimate relationship with Jesus, and He longs for our relationship with him to grow deeper and stronger. When we read the Bible he reminds us of his promises. When we pray to him he answers. When we are exhausted by lockdown, and fearful of the months ahead or frustrated by the limitations set on our lives we can take them to the one whose grace and mercy is unfailing, confident that nothing can separate us from his love. We may be a forgetful people but the Grace of Jesus Christ covers our sin, and is sufficient that we

might no longer receive punishment for our guilt but instead, as Israel received Grace from God through Moses, receive grace upon grace through the perfect sacrificial love of Jesus Christ.

CONSLUCSION

Years ago, I knew a lad called Sam, who gave his life to Jesus having faced some real struggles in his family and school life. It was such a joy to see his life transformed! But that joy became a real sadness when, soon after his baptism he seemed to so quickly forget Jesus, forget all he had done for him and go back to the life he lived before. It was a complicated and messy situation, but what gave me hope was that God's grace is so much greater and goes so much deeper than I will ever understand and I am convinced that God is not finished with Sam yet!

Moses was only a fore-runner to the perfect rescuer that is Jesus Christ. Yes, Moses was the one God called, and in chapter 32 verse 32 we read that he was even prepared to be a sacrifice himself, for the sake of Israel, that they might be forgiven.

But Moses could not perfectly mediate between the people and God because he too was forgetful and rebellious. Only Jesus' sacrifice was perfect and sufficient to deal with all sin for all time. And my friend Sam only needs to turn back to Jesus' to once again receive his forgiveness.

So, let's not have the memory of a fish...but instead the memory of an elephant! Elephants never forget – Let's not forget that God's saving plan was accomplished fully through the death and resurrection of Christ. Let us remember that He is the only true demonstration of God's Gracious Heart which is so quick to forgive his forgetful, rebellious people whoever they are..