

Wednesday with the Word

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Exploring How Fear Can Create False Worship

Exodus 32:1-8 New International Version (NIV)

The Golden Calf

32 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[a] 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.”

2 Aaron answered them, “Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.” **3** So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. **4** He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, “These are your gods,[b] Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”

5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, “Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord.” **6** So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

7 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. **8** 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, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’

Let's start with defining fear:

fear

/ˈfɪr/

an unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that someone or something is dangerous, likely to cause pain, or a threat.

phobos: panic flight, fear, the causing of fear, terror

Exodus 32:1

- Fear is a natural emotion and can be seen as a survival mechanism. As humans when the emotion arises, we have a strong tendency to go with what we know and rely on instincts, habits and self to pull us out of situations. But unfortunately moving out of fear can cause us to rely on habits that push us further away from God. Already we begin to see the ripple effects, and detriments of moving at our own pace, and intentionally against the will of God.
- The Israelites start off by stating exactly who it was that Moses is and has been to them, and yet two verses later we see a change of pace in their language to Aaron about what brought them out of Egypt.
- Here we see fear beginning to weigh down on their faith. You see fear can have you knowing the truth of a thing and still moving against it for the comfort of you.
- I believe it's important to note that Moses wasn't God, he was the chosen vessel of leadership; called to lead the isrealite people to their promised land.
- And yet, here we have them showing us a vivid picture of what it looks like when shortcuts, cut us short...

Do you only believe when you are in the presence of your leader ?

- People are constantly searching and seeking for something or someone to put their hope and trust in, because it is in fact hope and trust that fuels our faith...
- May I suggest that this text is presenting to us the pressures of overthinking, prior to making a decision out of pure fear and anxiety.

How many of us can admit that we sometimes move prematurely because we are operating from a place of fear ?

- What we turn to in moments of fear... MATTERS!!

What or who are you turning to during this time of transition not just within Wheat Street Baptist Church, but in the United States?

Exodus 32:2-6

- I think it's important to highlight that acting out of fear, or reluctance can have many different ripple effects on the outcome of your situation. "What you do today, truly matters for where you go tomorrow..."

Back in both Chapter 6 & 7 and as early as Chapter 3 Moses tells God each time that he speaks with "Faltering lips" and can't do what God is asking him to do alone. After the third time (Exodus 7:30) God reminds and instructs Moses of his prophet Aaron that will assist him in freeing the Israelites and bringing them to the promised Land...

Why don't we see Aaron stopping the people after they've requested to serve and worship another god?

- Aaron is dealing with an intense situation. We see people that have been complaining, are frustrated, worried, scared, broken, and mentally bound despite their physical liberation. Not to mention, my imagination of just how aggressive they were in this moment, and yet the text shows us no prior conversation between Aaron and Moses before Moses's departure.
- I wanted to remind you of chapter 6 and 7 earlier because God gives very specific instructions to Moses about how the structure between God, him, and Aaron will go. God tells Moses these words in Exodus 7: "Then the Lord said to Moses, "See, I have

made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. 2 You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country.”

- You see it's in times like the ones the Israelites were experiencing where we see that instructions matter in moments of fear. God's previous messaging MATTERS.
- Might I offer to you that this leadership style that we see demonstrated by Aaron and even Moses can help to give us language and examples that there is no perfect leadership. For we know even in our imperfectness that Romans 8:28 tells us, all things can and will work together for our good...
- We just have to do our best to follow the instructions of the LIVING word of God.
- Fear can grip, snare or entangle even the best of us both in leadership and as believers. Yet whom shall we trust or turn to in these moments... will we choose #Fear or Future.

This is what it looks like when you don't seek out God's voice, but instead move hastily or from a place of impulse. The word says in Proverbs 28:25 “To make rash, hasty decisions shows that you are not trusting the Lord. But when you rely totally on God, you will still act carefully and prudently.”

- “Let's begin to explore the importance of STILL FAITH: which involves waiting carefully, and prudently as proverbs tells us before moving hastily while in extreme moments of fear or chaos. It is through the action of being still that we can truly begin to seek out exactly what it is that God is saying to us about what we are enduring, and seeing throughout the experience...
- In verse 3 we see the people's request “come make us gods' to worship being orchestrated by Aaron. What is so interesting about this is that although the israelites are fearful of being lost, without leadership they still make a request to Aaron to do what **they want** with these “new found gods”.

Isn't it funny how you can deliberately ponder on a thing.... And still just get it WRONG.

- You will always get it wrong when it becomes about flesh rather than faith.

Verses 3-5 we find Aaron instructing them to take off the earrings of the wives, sons, and daughters (men/sons Were wearing earrings)... and bring them to him so that he can create with their gold these false gods for worship.

In the absence of leadership who are you turning to ?

- Even in fear, and in the midst of confusion, they used what they already possessed to create what it was they felt would bring them the most comfort. May I offer to you comfort, isn't always the answer. Majority of the time it's a distraction.

- It's important to understand the power of what we carry and the choice we have to use it for either good or bad. What I love is that God shows us time, and time again the ability and profound gift He has bestowed upon us to create. These earrings were materials used in the WRONG way...

What is it in this season, that God is calling us to-- that can create a space or outlet for good and sound worship?

I think at this moment it's important to clarify the definitive word for Worship:

Webster defines it as :

worship

/'wɜːSHəp/

the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for a deity, show reverence and adoration for (a deity); honor with religious rites

The Word 'Worship' In Greek

- **doxa-** dignity, glory, and glorious. If you look up the word worship, you'll find out there's a noun form of the word. It means excellence in character. Doxa is used to describe the wonderful glory, character, and wonderful reputation of God.
- **eusebeo-** (toward God) worship or (toward parents) to respect. This term means 'to reverence'. Eusebeo is used in these two scriptures:
- In my public worship class my Professor Dr. Abbington talked about the root word of worship: The **word** is derived from the Old English weorþscipe, meaning to venerate "**worship**, honour shown to an object, which has been etymologised as "worthiness or worth-ship"—to give, at its simplest, worth to something...

- This is one of the many reasons why worship is so essential to building, and strengthening our relationship with God throughout extreme moments of fear. The encounter experiences in the moments of our worships, helps to give us language to what he's saying and doing in our lives.
- If the enemy can get us to alter these things and to begin seeking out, other idols such as the ones displayed throughout the story

Exodus 32:4

- The text doesn't say that Aaron then told them "these are your gods", it states that they themselves say this (israelites)... To be honest, I wonder if Aaron at this moment began to see just how murky the decision he'd made had been.
- What Aaron does next is pivotal: He makes an altar in front of the calf (the false idol), and announced that the next day there would be a festival to the Lord... (capital L)... Could it be that the text is doing this so that we can know it was God whom Aaron was really getting the people to worship?

Although, they still proceeded to worship these other false gods...

- I had to check the placement of the object and the altar, I believe Aaron demonstrates here what it looks like when a leader takes the more unconventional route... when dealing with misguided and scared people.

Aaron doesn't say to them, I am doing this because of this... he just does it!

- The people then wake up the next morning and begin to do what it is that they've known, and have done with Moses and Pharaoh. They sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings to the altar made for the Lord.
- I believe as Christians and true believers of Christ this part of text helps us to see that when all else fails, turning back to what you know can be common. However, turning to the God that we serve is imperative. Especially when fear is defining your season of separation or solitude. You see it is, in this decision that Aaron has made that has further convinced me of the importance of pushing past the fear of what you know or what the majority is saying but rather do what we know is right and that is to worship The Lord our God.

- **BUT on the flipside:** we also see how going back to what you've know can bring about your future detriment and demise. Let's not forget the history of the Israelites and just how long they were in bondage; serving a false god was all they'd come to know for a long time.. Even with being rescued they too were returning back to what they'd become accustomed to. I can imagine that many wrestled with each other in regards to not wanting to serve the calf, but sadly the majority did.

Be careful! In this season of following the majority...

This is #STILLFAITH

- As previously stated people are always searching and seeking out something or someone to ascribe to searching for something to give reverence to. While wrestling with my thoughts on Aaron I began to wonder....

What are we showing them with our actions? Who Is it that our actions say we serve?

**Exodus 32:7-8
(God responds..)**

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. 8 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, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’”

- Here we are getting to the meat of the point I believe God is truly opening us up to, that it is the peoples fear of the absence of their leader Moses that “corrupts” them to turn to false gods to satisfy their longing to serve. And yet, here we have God saying to Moses in this text that not only have they turned from Moses but God.
- God states that the people have been quick to turn away from all that He has commanded them too, and even references them as stiff-necked people. stubborn-stuck-bound....

What are we holding onto that could potentially be stiffening our necks?

- You see I believe that fear exposes faith, or the lack thereof and it is in this exposure that we either become convicted or corrupted.
- Above all things, including the fear that we can only imagine the Israelites felt, I think it's important

to lift up the condition of the people. While entering into this place of solitude, or separation from their leader, what was their mental condition?

What happens when a poor or malnourished mental condition meets a crisis?

- You see it was when the Israelites had gone for a long period of time, while BEING in the wilderness that they began to move hastily out of fear, and entering into this form of “corruption” that God speaks of.

Could it be that in this season God is pulling our attention away from man, away from the leaders, and back to Him?

Could it not be that in this corruption caused by us, God is exposing in these moments the greatest need for Him? That flesh nor fear could never fix the problem or desire but can lead you to the One true and Living God.