



Looking Inwards (15 mins) Caring For Each Other

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) Concern For Others

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



HG161 Moses: The Prince Of Egypt The Golden Calf

Exodus 32:1-14

Home Group Study Notes

18 March 2018 - Hilary Porritt



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful for your discussions.



Welcome (10 mins) Ice Breaker

When was the last time you had to wait for something? How long did you wait? What did you feel like? Can anything good come out of waiting?



Looking Upwards (10 mins) Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...

You might want to change the order this week, and have a time of worship after the Bible Study.

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HG161 *Moses: The Prince Of Egypt* **The Golden Calf**

Exodus 32:1-14

Home Group Sermon

18 March 2018 - Hilary Porritt

Introduction In our Home Group sermon series, we've been reading the story of Moses and the Israelite people, and so far it's been an exciting and dramatic story. We've heard about God's hand on Moses' life, from the moment he was born, and how he led God's people from slavery in Egypt to the promise of freedom and a land of their own. And each week we've been reminded that the same promise of freedom from slavery, of rescue and a new hope for the future, is ours because of what Jesus has done for us. It's an inspiring story, full of action, victory and celebration!

This week we are brought back to earth- here the story takes a downward turn. Here in our reading from Exodus 32 we see the Israelites making a big mistake- and we have to ask ourselves, what went wrong? Why did they do something so stupid? How come, after all the great things God had done for them, were they so quick to forget Him? And, if its possible that they screwed up like this, might it be possible for us too? Is there anything we can learn from this episode that might help us avoid making the same mistakes?

You'll notice, if you have been following our sermon series, that we've taken quite a big leap forward. Last time Pauline talked about the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus 14, and now we've jumped straight to Exodus 32. Imagine it a bit like one of those crime shows on TV- the opening scenes are of the crime that has been committed- someone gets pushed off a tall building, shot or we just see a body in a pool of blood. It's a shocking, gruesome scene that we can't make sense of- and then the show winds back time and starts telling the story a few days earlier, and gradually we begin to piece together what led to this point.

So having gazed at this scene of the Israelites worshipping a golden calf, let's wind back in time to 40 days earlier. We're going back 40 days because that's when Moses left the people at the foot of Mount Sinai to go and talk to God. And we know that 40 days is a significant space of time. Right now we are in the middle of the 40 days of Lent- remembering the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness. 40 days is a time of testing, of reviewing our lives and what's important to us, of giving up some of our unhelpful habits. The problem with a test is that there's always the possibility of failing.

If you have a bible with you, then we can find out what was happening 40 days earlier by turning back to Exodus chapter 24. By this time Moses has already received the Ten Commandments from God, and our next Exodus sermon in April will be looking at those. Moses wanted to make sure the people heard and understood the words of God, so look at chapter 24 verse 3: *When Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the Lord has said we will do."* Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said. Then what did Moses do next? *He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain.*

4. Read Hebrews 12:18-24. What has the blood of Jesus done for us?

5. Reading God's word regularly reminds us of the truth and exposes lies. Share what helps you to read the Bible.

6. Real worship often leaves us with a renewed vision of God's glory. When have you had an experience of being renewed through worship?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. The people of Israel had been waiting for 40 days for Moses to come back, when they asked Aaron to make them an idol. What times or circumstances have made it hard for you to keep going in your faith?

2. How important are emotions in Worship?

3. What does it mean to you to be part of the body of Christ? Which parts of worship help remind you of this?

Moses worshipped God. Let's look closely at what he did, because it will be helpful in showing us what not to do!

Plan Moses had a plan. He got up early the next morning, and built an altar with a particular shape and design. It was a decision he made, his worship was intentional. It was important to him that his life, his decisions, his actions were grounded in God and he made time and space to meet with God and worship Him.

Community Moses set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. His worship here was not a personal thing, but a community event. He even got the youth group involved, sending young men to organise the sacrifices of young bulls and fellowship offerings. This was an act of worship for all the people, to remind them of their identity as the people of God, the God who had rescued them from slavery and who promised to be with them.

Blood Bulls were sacrificed, because blood was an important part of this worship. When we come into God's holy presence, we are immediately aware of who He is and who we are- a holy God cannot look upon sin. Moses' altar had to be built at the foot of the mountain, not at the top because God was too holy. There is no way that people can meet with God- they will die. An encounter with God is a matter of life and death- and God had made it possible for his people to meet him when blood was spilt on their behalf.

One of the great things we have been realising as we read through Exodus, perhaps especially as we approach Easter, is how it helps us understand the death of Jesus. Just as at the first Passover, the Israelites were covered by the blood on their doorposts, so we are covered by the blood of Jesus. Here in this act of worship, as Moses collected the blood and sprinkled it on the people, it must have been a vivid reminder of that last night in Egypt when they sprinkled blood to protect them from the angel of death. This act of worship was all about what God had done for them.

God's Word Remember how when Moses told the people God's words the day before, he had written them down? Here's why- because the next part of this act of worship was reading God's words. *Moses took the book of the covenant and read it to the people.*

Response: Obedience The people responded "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey." This encounter with the holiness of God, this realisation that the blood saved them from death and brought them life, the words of truth that they heard had an effect on the people listening. It challenged them to change, to become the people that God wanted them to be, to leave behind their past life as slaves and grow into a new people who were free, who lived life in the way that God had designed, to know the dignity of being fully human.

Vision of Glory Finally, this act of worship culminated in a vision of God's glory. The writer of Exodus is usually pragmatic, rather than imaginative or emotional- but here in a few verses we see him struggling for words to describe the presence of God. *Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli, as bright blue as the sky. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.*

We have here in chapter 24 a picture of all that worship should be - an intentional part of our lives, an important habit to ground us and be the foundation of all we do not just something we do privately and individually, but a communal act that reminds us that we are God's family only possible because of the blood of Jesus based on truth- hearing God's words read, or sung, or preached- Real worship demands a reaction, a response- it can be a challenge to us, an encouragement, a renewed commitment or a life changing decision

And worship so often gives us a renewed vision of God - his glory, his love for us, his mercy in forgiving us

It's come to the end of this time of worship, and while we would be looking forward to coffee and biscuits, Moses is called up the mountain to hear more from God and receive the tablets of stone. *V 18: Then Moses entered the cloud as he went up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.*

So now let's fast forward again 40 days.....to see how the Israelites were getting on. This was where our bible reading for today started, remember? *When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered round Aaron and said, "Come, let us make 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."*

Emotion These 40 days had been a testing time for them- they were getting fed up of waiting, they didn't know when Moses would be back, and they knew they were missing something. They needed something more than themselves- they needed something to worship, something to give them meaning and purpose. But, instead of planning to continue to worship in the way that Moses had shown them, they seem to act here out of their neediness, out of impatience, driven by emotion.

Does God want us to be moved to worship by our emotions- to praise Him when we feel close to Him, to cry out to Him when we feel desperate? Yes, of course- we have the whole book of Psalms to give voice to our emotions. But does He only want us to worship when we feel like it? Because for some of us, that might not be very often! We need to have a plan for worship, a habit- for Christians, we start the week with worship, we worship on a Sunday whether we feel like it or not. Then we read in verse 4 and 5: *Aaron took what they handed to him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. He built an altar in front of the calf.*

Individual What had happened to the community getting involved? All they had been asked for was gold to fund this idea of Aaron's. We don't know what Aaron's motivations or reasons were, just as we aren't told whether anyone challenged him. It sounds like a one man show. I think we should be cautious of acts of worship which are all about one person- with no room for the voices or the involvement of the community. It's all too easy for that person to become seduced by their position, their power, or their own good ideas.

Lifeless Then of course there is the golden calf itself. The sad thing is that this was made to look like the bulls that were sacrificed- but it was a fake. It was completely lifeless. It never had been alive, and was not dead now. It was probably beautiful- gold and shiny. But it was an empty shell, with no power to save the people.

It seems really obvious to us now, reading the story, that a golden calf was a useless idol. We can't believe the Israelites were so stupid, why didn't they see it for what it was? But maybe we should be warned by how easily they were diverted from true worship, to worshipping something that just looked the part. Something that looked, in fact, better- a new, improved model, bright and shiny and expensive. Can we, too, be easily seduced into seeking meaning, guidance, significance from the bright and shiny offers all around us- an impressive linked -in profile and sparkling CV that will get us that fulfilling job? A remodelled living room or an updated car that will proclaim how successful we are and make us feel better? A new relationship, because the old one has become tired and boring?

Our idols may even come looking a bit like the things God offers us- friends, love, purpose, significance, freedom We so easily fall into believing the lies that our culture tells us.

Lies Lies were part of the worship of the golden calf too. In verse 4 we hear the people say *"These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."* We don't hear anything here about God's words being read, God's covenant being remembered. Without it, it's all too easy to slip into believing what everyone else is saying.

Indulgence What was the effect of this fake worship? The response of the people was to eat and drink and indulge in revelry. Far from their lives being challenged, they now felt they could do exactly what they liked. That's precisely what so many of our idols today offer us- 'If it feels good, do it.' 'You're worth it.' 'It's me time'....etc These are all beguiling messages, in the short term. But here's the thing- this is fake worship.

Brokenness When Moses comes down the mountain with the stone tablets in his hands and sees what the people have done, he smashes those tablets and breaks them into pieces. And when we turn away from God, something gets broken We break our relationship with Him- and that brokenness ripples out into broken relationships with each other, broken communities and broken lives. The end of this chapter in Exodus is terrible to read. So much hurt, pain and suffering.

Worship is not about singing the right songs, using the right prayers or having the right feelings. Real worship is about looking the right way- turning our gaze to God, who is Holy and worthy of our worship, who gave his Son as a sacrifice for our sins so that we can know the saving power of His blood, and who sends His Spirit to change us, to restore us from our brokenness to become people of the living God.

At the end of his life, Moses stood before the people of Israel, people who God had rescued from slavery and called to be His people and yet who had made so many mistakes. These were Moses' words to them:

"This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may know the LORD your God, listen to His voice and hold fast to Him." *Deuteronomy 30:19,20*

Emmanuel Church Text for 2018

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the spirit of sonship.

And by him we cry 'Abba Father.'

Romans 8:15