

GREAT SIN, GREATER GRACE

An exposition of Exodus 32
at West Hills San Jose on May 24, 2020

PUBLIC INTERCESSION: Lord we come before you in the name of your son Jesus, and we bring with us our all of our troubles, our anxieties, our fears and frustrations, and with humility and contrition and faith...we cast all of them down at your feet. And we don't do this because we think it will be cathartic Lord, we do this because you care for us. We do it because you love us, and because you hear and see, and act on behalf of your people, who have been united to Christ by your saving power. Lord come! Come in power and set creation finally free from it's groaning. Reveal the glory of the sons of God, and let righteousness and justice burst forth as the noon day.

God help us be filled with the great hope you have laid before us. Not hope that a quarantine will end. Hope that the kingdom of God will be finally fully established upon the earth...that the New Jerusalem will descend from heaven, that death will be no more and that you will wipe every tear from every eye of those who love you. Lord I am convinced that the only thing that will keep your church tethered to reality, and not to be cast to and fro by every change in the daily news is a concrete vision of the glory of God...sanctify us Lord, as the people who hear, who believe, who see and understand. Thank you for your holy Word. While everything around us changes the Word does not. Thank you for your Spirit who dwells within us. While plans and strategies and expectations come and go...the Spirit abides. And thank you for your holy church Lord, governments, banks, nations and empires come and go. And yet your church abides by the strength that you supply. Strengthen us Lord for the road ahead.

Lord we pray for our national, state and county leaders. Grant them wisdom, justice and righteousness. We thank you that the heart of the king is like a stream of water in your hand and that you will turn it where you wish. And we pray to this end, that you would enable your people to live a quiet life, dignified in every way, working diligently with our hands, that we might have much to share with those in need. Would you restore public worship in a way that leads to life and not to death, to blessing and not to plague, and I ask for wisdom for us as a leaders that you would God before us in how to do that.

I pray for our church...I pray for everyone listening to me...as the whole world is posturing as if they ACTUALLY know who to ACTUALLY trust, I pray that we your people would first and foremost trust you. Not just in word...not just as our official position...but from the heart, with all our mind soul and strength. You are our fortress, our anchor our strength. For you alone our soul waits in silence. I ask that you would speak to us this morning from your word. Your servants are listening. In Christ's name, Amen.

PROBLEM: This morning we are going to be talking about one of the most basic questions of the Christian life. And though it's a basic question, it is a question that we need to revisit over and over again. And that question, that issue is this: what should I do when I sin? What should I do? Should I just try to quickly move on and pretend like it didn't happen? Should I silently stew in my guilt and wait for the feeling to pass? What if it's a sin I have been trapped in for a while, and I'm afraid of being honest because of how it will affect the people around me? Wouldn't it

be better to keep my sin hidden **where no one can see it?** Where no one can see it...where no one can see it? Is there a dark enough deep enough place in all of creation that absolutely NO ONE can see? No...God sees. Our hearts are open and laid bare before Him. But these are the kinds of lies our flesh will concoct to convince our minds to keep our sin in the darkness aren't they? This is the kind of lie, sin will marshal to keep us enslaved to its power. But in the gospel...we have been given a clear map out of that dark castle. We have been given a lamp to lead us out of that valley of death, and into green pastures and beside quiet waters where God will restore your soul.

When you sin, when you fail, when you act or think, or tolerate attitudes of sin in your mind or heart...there is only one clear and obvious and painful and beautiful way forward in the Christian life...and it is my main point today:

MAIN POINT: When you sin, radically repent and entrust yourself to the profound mercy of God

SETTING THE CONTEXT: Today, we are going to be formally introduced by the biblical text to the profound sinfulness of Israel. This sin has been hinted at in the book, but not squarely faced. The enemy up to this point in Exodus has mainly been the oppressive nations, Pharaoh in Egypt, the Amalekites and so on. But today, smack dab in the middle of God describing the directions for holy worship, Israel's sin will be open and laid bare before all. Now to quickly set the context...Israel is in a situation that you may or may not be able to identify with.

God's people are eagerly waiting to get to the promised land. The land flowing with milk and honey. But they are stuck in the desert. And they aren't allowed to leave. And the reason they aren't allowed to leave is that they are waiting on their leader to come back with guidelines and a plan for what will be involved in getting from where they are to where they want to go. But in the mean time, they are just stuck...waiting...and it's hot, and they are frustrated. And many of their concerns are probably valid...what if the Amalekites come back and attack us. And so forth...but they are at the mountain where they received the covenant from God. And Moses their leader is up on the mountain speaking to God face to face. And God's people in this text...are going to respond to that situation. And I think it will be very instructive for us...to simply watch, consider and pray...and as we go through this, to be honestly asking ourselves...what do I do when I sin? Let's now humble our minds and open our hearts for the reading of the word of the Lord.

READING: [1] When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together (against) to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, *the man* who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." [2] So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." [3] So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. [4] And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" [5] When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said,

“Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD.” [6] And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

[7] And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. [8] They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’” [9] And the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. [10] Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.”

[11] But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? [12] Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. [13] Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.’” [14] And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing **on his people**.

[15] Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets that were written on both sides; on the front and on the back they were written. [16] The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. [17] When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, “There is a noise of war in the camp.” [18] But he said, “It is not the sound of shouting for victory, or the sound of the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing that I hear.” [19] And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them **at the foot of the mountain. (Where the people stood at attention before the Lord)** [20] He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it.

[21] And Moses said to Aaron, “What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?” [22] And Aaron said, “Let not the anger of my lord burn hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. [23] For they said to me, ‘Make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ [24] So I said to them, ‘Let any who have gold take it off.’ So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.”

[25] And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies), [26] **then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, “Who is on the LORD's side? Come to me.”** And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. [27] And he said to them, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.’” [28] And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell. [29] And Moses said,

“Today you have been ordained for the service of the LORD, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother, so that he might bestow a blessing upon you this day.”

[30] The next day Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” [31] So Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. [32] But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.” [33] But the LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. [34] But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.”

[35] Then the LORD sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made. (ESV)

PRAYER: Lord open the eyes of our hearts to behold glorious things in your law. Amen.

ROAD MAP: 1.) What was Israel’s great sin? 2.) What is the meaning of the responses of God and Moses? and 3.) What this story teaches us about life in Christ.

WHAT WAS ISRAEL’S GREAT SIN?

1. So because this is such a long text I’m not going to be rereading things but simply referring down to verse numbers so hopefully you have a bible with you this morning. If you don’t, simply open your internet browser and search Exodus 32 ESV to find a link to the translation I will be using for the sermon. But let’s now jump into our text.
2. Verse 1 begins with an observation. The people see that Moses was delayed. Or an alternative translation...the people saw that Moses was taking forever. What is it about having to wait...that it so often serves as the context for sin?
 1. Let me just stop for a second and dwell on this for a moment. I’m not even talking about the shelter in place right now I’m talking about life. It has been my pastoral observation, that periods of waiting often function as fertile soil for sin. Whether it’s sinful anxiety. A sinful grasping for control, which is idolatry. It’s probably important to recognize this about ourselves. We live in a time and in a place where we can get almost anything we could possibly want quickly.
 2. And getting what we want, quickly, over and over again can have a soul shaping effect. It can start forming our expectations of God in an unhelpful way. We can start treating God like Amazon. God I’m clicking the button, why aren’t you doing what I want. Getting what I want over and over and over again can give me the false impression that I am in control of the world in direct contradiction to what the Word of God, and the reality of God so often imposes upon you...that you are not in control.
 3. And so sometimes God makes you wait...and you can frame that in your own mind as why won’t God just give me what I want...or you can receive it as grace...God is trying to reshape my soul in such a way that I will stop wanting my kingdom to come and my will to be done and start desiring His kingdom and His will. This isn’t just a contemporary problem. The people saw that Moses was delayed and they decided to act.

3. The people gathered together, and the Hebrew can convey the sense that they came together AGAINST Aaron. The ESV typically opts for the more ambiguous option when the text is difficult to translate but given the context and give the way Moses uses these words in other places I think it makes sense that the people gathered AGAINST Aaron, so the idea is...they were like do this or else.
4. And the demand of the people was simple. Make us an idol. Make us gods who shall go before us. Who knows where this Moses has gone...he is taking forever and we need to get our of here. The ESV translates the word gods plural but the word is the same that Exodus has used for the one God everywhere else elohim. Make for us elohim. And when Aaron actually makes the idol he just makes the one which would seem to argue against translating the word as “gods’ plural. But instead as the plural of majesty...great rulers would be referred to in the plural as a testimony to their greatness...not because there was more than one of them.
5. So Aaron says give me all your gold and all the people do it. And Aaron literally takes it all in verse 4, reforges it and shapes it into a statue of a young bull or a golden calf. And the people of Israel say “These are your gods, O Israel who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.”
 1. So again, you have Israel pointing at this single statue saying these are your elohim. But then you have the added point of context that this Elohim is the god who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Now think about that for a second. I know I may or may not be bumping up against some of the things that showed up in Sunday school as a kid, but look at the text. The God who led them out of Egypt was an abstract or theoretical concept.
 1. They are talking about the literal God who turned the Nile to blood. The literal God that swallowed the Armies of Egypt at the red sea. The literal God that drove back the Amalekites that gave water and mana every day in the desert and who at that very moment was resting in a glory cloud upon the mountain above them.
 2. When they say make us a god to go before us...they are saying MAKE US AN IDOL OF HIM UP THERE because Moses is taking forever.
 2. They make the bull and say this is the God who led us out of Egypt. Verse 5 Aaron builds an altar and says Tomorrow shall be a feast to YAHWEH, God’s covenant name. To be sure, there are some people who think that Israel suddenly desired a strange pagan god to worship and so they made the young bull out of gold. But if you just step back and look at the text...to me it looks like the people wanted an idol of Yahweh. If you skip down to verse 35 at the end of the chapter, and it describes God’s stroke of discipline upon the people...you get the two-fold emphasis on the verb making. God sent the plague because they MADE the CALF...the one that Aaron MADE.
 3. In other words I don’t think that this was a violation of commandment #1. I think this is a violation of Commandment number 2 is that you shall MAKE no graven image to worship.
6. God says...guys don’t make idols of me or anything else. Don’t worship pictures of me that you make up with your imagination. Apparently there is a good deal of archeological evidence that in Egypt...they regularly represented powerful God’s with the image of a

young bull, or a young calf. It was a common symbol of divine strength. And so if that is applicable here...than what this text is showing you is Israel reverting to Egyptian practices of worship. This is religious syncretism...the mixing of religious practices.

7. God says wait wait wait I will show you how to worship me in the tabernacle...but in the waiting...Israel reverts to what is familiar and what is comfortable, even if what is familiar and comfortable...is a great sin in the eyes of God.
8. Why is this a great sin? Well when God wants to help human beings understand how he views idolatry he compares it with adultery. The way it feels when that happens to you... that's how I feel when you worship idols. When you look at an image of something else, that looks NOTHING LIKE ME, and say that is my God, it's like you love someone else. Brothers and sisters this idolatry is a great great sin. The next day verse 6 the people all brought sacrifices and offered them to the idol...and they feasted and rose up to celebrate.
 1. I have heard that the word "play" carries sexual overtones but that wasn't obvious to me in my studies. What can be shown from the text is that there was loud shouting and singing and dancing as the people worshipped the idol. And I think it is more helpful to not attempt to take the text further than that.
9. And the reason is...if you leave the picture as it is....the great sin...the horrible gut wrenching sin...is that the nation forged an idol...and they all got super into it and excited by it...and their hearts engaged this idol worship. This wasn't an act of a carnal gratifying of the flesh. This was actual worship of an idol. Loud singing, shouting, dancing...to me that says...guilty guilty guilty. No innocent bystanders...only willing participants in spiritual adultery. So this is Israel's great sin...that they broke God's covenant by making an idol of him and worshipping it. And all of them were complicit. Not as unwilling participants...but as those who joined in the yelling and shouting and singing and dancing. Let's now turn to the question

WHAT TO MAKE OF GOD AND MOSES' RESPONSE

1. Let me just say at the outset that I believe that this is a test of Moses, it reminds me of the test of Abraham. God said to Abraham take your son, your only son, and offer him on the mountain I will show you. And you realize by the end of the story that God never intended to have Abraham offer Isaac it was a test. But the test wasn't for God, the test was for Abraham, to purify his faith.
2. But unlike the Abraham story...we aren't given this snap-shot of innocent Isaac asking... daddy where is the sacrifice? In the Abraham story you agonize over the idea that Isaac would be put to death. In this passage the story is framed in almost the opposite way... Yahweh says to Moses...the people whom you have brought out of Egypt have acted corruptly. They have broken the covenant, they have for themselves an idol and they have worshipped it. They are guilty and worthy of death. And here is why I think it's a test...God says LEAVE ME ALONE verse 10...why would God say that? Leave me alone so I can pour out wrath on this people.
 1. And then he adds something else...leave me alone to pour out my wrath in order that I may make a great nation out of you! So just a few observations about that...first of all, in the Scriptures there is a long rich tradition of God showing prophets that judgement is

coming upon a people beforehand, with the expectation that the prophet will intercede with prayer or proclamation, and God in response will show mercy.

2. And it's worth asking...why say it in advance? Why not just do it. And the reason is, God wants to draw His people into His plan of redemption. God wants to form our hearts to be like His own heart...he wants us to desire as he desires...that all people would be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth...even our enemies...HELLO story of Jonah.
3. And the second thing that suggests that this is a test is what God says in verse 10, if I destroy them, I can make everything all about you Moses. A great nation of you. And of course God has made promises to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And so the question is Moses...do you want my kingdom to come or your kingdom to come. Whose glory are you concerned with, Mine or yours.
3. And Moses' answer is going to reflect that he is ultimately heart is concerned with God's kingdom and God's glory but if you don't mind a little analogizing for a moment I want you to think about what is happening here. Moses sees people walking in sin that is deserving of death. And the test of Moses is...do you want me to give it to them yes or no? This stiff necked people that have served as a perpetual headache to your leadership...do you want me to just make your problem go away at the expense of my glory. In other words, I can glorify you or glorify me, which would you prefer? Let me suggest to you that every time someone sins against you...you are invited into that test.
 1. Do you want that person to pay for what they have done, or do you want mercy and grace for them? Do you care about my kingdom being built up when someone sins against you...or do you care about your little kingdom? Every conflict you are ever in...is a fresh opportunity to be formed into the image of Christ...who does not desire that any should perish but that all would be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.
 2. And as we will see...that means desiring to help people see their sin, repent from it and be reconciled to God. Not that you should let people just continue in their sin. I'm talking about the test of your hearts motive...what do you want when conflicts arise? Do you want them to receive the mercy and instruction of the Lord...or do you want them to get what they deserve? Do you want God to be glorified...or do you want your own person to be vindicated?
4. Moses responds to God by laying out 3 arguments for why God should be merciful...each of them connected to God's glory and faithfulness.
 1. First In verse 11, why would you nullify the results of your great demonstrations of power. You brought us out with power and great might...don't let your strength appear to have failed.
 2. Second In verse 12 why would you give your enemies a reason to impugn your name? If you destroy your people the Egyptians will say see, Yahweh is just a cruel tyrant who likes to hurt people.
 3. And finally verse 13, remember your promises to Abraham, Isaac and Israel, which you swore by yourself. Remember your own great faithfulness to your Word Lord.
5. And in response to Moses prayer God relented from the disaster He had spoken of bringing on and it says HIS people. This interaction started with God saying to Moses "Go down for

YOUR people...have corrupted themselves.” It’s almost as though God is conveyed as distancing himself from Israel. But in verse 14, this dialogue closes with the author calling Israel “God’s own people.” Moses passed the test, and in response to Israel’s great sin...God will show great mercy.

6. Notice, when it says the LORD relents of bringing the disaster that he had spoken of, it is referring to verse 10 where God says He will consume the people in his wrath...or in other words...utterly destroy the nation. That is what he is relenting of. He isn’t going to relent of all action or correction or discipline. He is relenting from the utter destruction of Israel.
7. So this is what the response of God and the response of Moses means...God was testing Moses while intending to show mercy. And Moses responded with a desire to glorify God and see His glory proclaimed among the nations.
8. So what have we seen so far. Israel has committed the great sin of idol worship. And God has brought Moses onto alignment with His own heart...desiring that the people would receive mercy and that God’s covenant faithfulness would be front and center in his dealing with His people. Let’s now begin our transition to:

WHAT THIS STORY TEACHES US ABOUT LIFE IN CHRIST

1. The remainder of this story is truly incredible and is a well spring of unending hope for the broken and contrite spirit. Moses goes back down the mountain after this test in verse 15 carrying with him the tablets of the covenant. Probably the 10 commandments. And verse 16 stresses...that these commands literally came from God. God engraved them...the people haven’t violated the will of Moses, they have violated the will of YAHWEH maker of heaven and earth.
2. As Moses descends the mountain...he meets Joshua who was waiting for him halfway up. And as they finish the descent together Joshua asks what is that loud noise? It sounds like battle...but it’s actually singing. And the two walked into the midst of the camp and saw the golden calf erected in the middle of the camp and all the people wildly dancing around it. This is like when it’s after bedtime, and I hear a raucous coming from my children’s bedroom...and I go in there...and everyone is out of bed. Everyone has been caught red-handed no one can claim ignorance.
3. In v. 19 Moses’ anger burned hot and he decides to perform a prophetic symbolic action. He walks to the foot of the mountain where the people would have formally gathered to stand and wait upon the Word of the Lord at Sinai...where they had agreed to obey all the Words that Yahweh had commanded...he went to the place where this solemn oath was sworn and he broke the tablets...as a symbol that the covenant had been broken by the people.
 1. Moses, with literally zero tolerance for syncretism in verse 20, takes the calf which would have been a wooden statue overlaid with gold and burned it to ash...and ground the ash down to powder. And through that powder into the water supply so that it would go into and out of the people...and so be utterly desecrated and devoted to destruction.
4. And next is a case study of how not to respond when you are caught in sin. Verse 21 Moses says to Aaron...what did the people do to you that you brought such great sin upon them?

1. To which Aaron replies in verse 22 well Moses, ya know it's there fault, they made me do it, BLAME SHIFTING... anyway they gave me their gold and I threw it into the fire and it just happened to come out shaped like a calf in verse 24 (denial and minimizing).
5. Verse 25, Moses, like God, isn't fooled. Moses saw that Aaron had let the people go wild and out of control and that sin was burning like wildfire through the camp. And so Moses issues a radical call to repentance. The entire nation is guilty, everyone has been caught in a terrible sin...and now they are given a choice verse 26...MOSES yells out whoever is on the Lord's side... come to me.
 1. It can be easy to miss what just happened there. Moses is saying...I see that all of you have committed idolatry and all of you are worthy of death...but if you want to repent from your idolatry and serve the Lord...come to me. There is grace. There is a way back. But your repentance must be radical.
 2. Verse 26 says ALL the sons of Levi gathered around him. And when all the repentant have come to Moses, Moses looks at the Levites and says in verse 27 that God commands you to put on your sword and to go from gate to gate throughout the camp and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor. And the Levites did according to the word of Moses and three thousand men fell.
 3. Now for those of us who have been raised in a country of religious tolerance and religious pluralism...that offends our sensibilities. Why would God put them to death? But try to think about this from a biblical perspective. God has ransomed His people out of slavery to be His special people. And they entered into covenant with Him at the mountain and promised to have no other God before Him.
 4. And God has promised to bring them to land, and to give them seed and blessing and life. And ultimately we know from the perspective of the New Covenant that God want's to bring them into eternal life, through faith in the Messiah to come. And Moses says to everyone...you need to stop embracing the things, and doing the things and teaching the things that are going to lead you and your neighbor to hell. God is trying to lead us to heaven, you don't have to come if you don't want to, but you cannot remain here embracing your idolatry. And everyone who accepted that, came to Moses. But three thousand men, didn't. And so God said, if they won't repent of their sin, they will die. And the Levites went through the camp, and those who would not reject their idolatry were put to death.
 5. The Levites were called upon to do something extremely painful. To put to death the unrepentant idol worshippers in the camp. Part of their repentance was the need to put to death, things that their heart still loved, but to do it for the sake of the holiness of the people. And on the other side of this radical repentance in verse 29 was blessing. God says, in being willing to accept this radical call to repentance, you have been consecrated to God's service, so that God might bless you.
6. The greatest lie our sin has ever told us, is that on the other side of repentance will be a curse. That is false...on the other side of repentance is blessing. It's always blessing, even if there are painful elements to it. Being closer to God...being restored to the light...is more glorious than discipline is painful.

7. You might be surprised to hear this, but sometimes when I am counseling someone who is dealing with addiction to drugs or alcohol, and it becomes clear that one of the primary obstacles to their repentance is a family member who is a constant source of temptation...I counsel them to break off that relationship. And the reason is...it is more important to be close to God than to be close to a family member...especially if that family member is trying to lead you away from God.
 1. Your relationship to your family is temporary. Your relationships to God is eternal... either for good or ill.
8. This text closes with Moses telling the people that they have sinned a great sin...they have broken God's covenant, and they need forgiveness. And the way in which that forgiveness will be secured is not by them doing something to rectify their relationship to God. This breach of covenant can only be healed by atonement in verse 30. And only hopefully. Moses says PERHAPS I can make atonement for your sins.
9. So Moses goes up...He pleads with God for mercy...and He says if you are not going to forgive them...than kill me also. Blot me out of your book. That is the degree of solidarity Moses feels with the people. And God responds by saying...I only blot out sinners Moses. You go lead the people, my angel will go with you. And I will deal with their sin in my own way. In other words...God responds to Moses' plea for mercy. And rather than giving the people what their sin deserved...it says in verse 35 that the LORD sent a plague on the people. No recorded deaths. A temporary illness...that came and went, that they might learn to fear the Lord.
10. So what are some lessons we can take from this concluding section of text for our walk with God. Well first...when we are caught in sin, blame shifting and minimizing is pointless. God saw everything that Aaron had done...and Moses knew what had happened. Aaron's only hope was that when Moses called upon Israel to repent...that he publicly...and probably red-faced left the idol and stood behind his younger brother.
 1. If you are caught in sin...there is only one way out...and it's not going to be the path of trying to convince people you aren't actually that wrong...that you didn't actually mean to do it...or that it's somebody else's fault. The only way forward is to turn from your sins towards the living God. To leave where you are and go to where you are supposed to be...humbled before God in repentance.
11. Second the invitation to repent is for everyone. Everyone was guilty...and everyone was given the opportunity to repent. There is always, always, always mercy for the broken and contrite of heart. These people had done something horrible. They had made an idol and worshipped it...and God doesn't respond out wrath...He is inclined to respond in mercy. Listen to ME...repentance doesn't lead to wrath repentance leads to mercy. If your flesh is telling you...I'm in too deep...I've gone to far...I'm too stuck to be free of my sins...God's mercy and steadfast love have been from of old Psalm 25:6. This tidal wave of grace that even now is drawing you to repentance is sourced from eternity past. Don't resist Him. Be set free and walk in the glorious freedom of the forgiven children of God!
12. When God sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins, and to be raised for our justification...He didn't do it to make salvation possible. He did it to actually cover your sins with His mercy. In Christ, the PERHAPS of Moses' atonement for sin, has become the

ACCOMPLISHED atonement for our sins. There is always mercy for us if we simply believe that Christ died for us, to cleanse us, to clear the record of debt against us, and to deliver us from the power of sin and darkness into the kingdom of God. If you have faith... you will be set free.

13. Finally, mercy doesn't necessarily mean that there will be no discipline. God showed mercy to the people but he still sent a plague among them. There may be consequences for our sin that are painful...but it is nothing compared to the consequences of repentance and being restored to your God.
14. This story is trying to tell you something about what God is actually like. God actually wants to save us, and forgive us, and restore us and bless us. But the only way forward is repentance. And if there is any part of your heart that doubts...consider this...if Moses in his human weakness can be an effective intercessor for the lives of the people...how much more can Christ, who is your great High Priest, interceding for you at the right hand of God.
15. If there is mercy in repose to the prayer of Moses...how much more to the shed blood and to the prayers of Christ, who knew no sin, who has covered us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. Yes brothers and sisters...Jesus loves us. He sees your weakness and he meets with strong mercy...he sees your brokenness and provides for it with unbreakable covenant love. God sees contrition and draws near with all the grace of heaven...and you are called to simply turn and receive it.
16. I want to close with a poem by the Anglican George Herbert written in the early 1600's.

Consider these words and consider your God.

“Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lacked anything
“A guest” I answered “worthy to be here”
Love said, “you shall be he”
“I the unkind, ungrateful? Oh my dear
I cannot look on Thee.
Love took my hand and smiling did replay,
Who made the eyes but I?
Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth serve.
And know you, says Love who bore the blame?
My dear then I will serve.
You must sit down says Love and taste my meat.
So I did sit and eat.
When you fall into sin, radically repent and entrust yourself to the profound mercy of God