

Presence//5 – “Absence”//Exodus 32

Prayer/Student Retreat

Over the past week I had one of the strangest things ever happen to me...

- About 3 weeks ago... chewed up cords... what is that?
- One day about a week later I turned on the air conditioning and it just made this awful trembling sound... (the fan) (now, my car has been wrecked and rebuilt so it's always making sounds and I just kind of ignore it because usually it goes away.) So, then I didn't think much of this...
- But then, like a week later... I returned from a trip, it was hot day, get in my car and turn on the ac and the most foul smell comes out... I almost threw up (and I have 3 kids so I'm pretty good with foul smells now)... so I take it to my mechanic (Lynn) and he takes a look and says, "Yep, you got you a dead rat in there..." **and he pulls this mangled rodent corpse out of the fan of my ac.**
- Now, he cleaned it all out... sprayed it down with 409 (Rednecks best friend), but guys, it still smells terrible. If you see me driving around RDU with my head hanging out the window, you know why...
- I asked him about it. He said, "Yeah... done all I can do. You just gonna have to let it work its way out." So I bought one of those little vent air fresheners and **now my car smells like a mixture of cheap roses, Lysol, and mouse carcass...** It's delightful!
- Well, in a very twisted kind of way, that whole situation is strikingly similar to what you're going to see happening to Israel in Exodus 32... (when I say twisted, there's no pun intended.)
- I had something dead in the heart of my central air system, and even after getting it out the traces of death are still in there and you can still smell 'em when you turn on the heat.

Well, you're going to see today that there is something dead in the heart of the Israelites, and even after they have been delivered from Egypt, it fills their lives with the aroma of death when the heat is on them... (come on now, that was a good introduction...)

^{32:1} When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together 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!"

- At first, this almost seems unbelievable, doesn't it?
- First, how long had they been out there? 3 months. 3 months since God had split the Red Sea and delivered them from the entire Egyptian army.
- Speaking of that, think about what all that they had seen, firsthand, in the last 3 months. In addition to the Red Sea, you had...
 - The plagues... which were not things like bad weather or an economic recession, but things like absolute darkness for 3 days and frogs overrunning Egypt
 - Then God led them out through via a gigantic pillar of cloud in the day and a pillar of fire the size of the Empire State Building by night
 - Then there was the whole Manna thing (which were these heavenly golden graham's that appeared miraculously on

the ground every morning so they could have something to eat)

- And when they got tired of the manna God made quail magically fall from the sky. (This has to be another underrated miracle: huge flocks of quail come flying over and then die in the sky and fall to the ground. Imagine...)
- Twice so far in these 3 months God has provided water for them supernaturally; once out of a rock that Moses smacked with a stick; and the other when Moses threw a tree into a salt water pond and it turned into a Brita water fountain.
- Then, here they are, standing at the foot of this mountain, which is like some kind of a scene out of poltergeist movie with all the paranormal phenomena going on... thunder and lightning and earthquakes and trumpet sounds and voices...
- And finally, for the last 3 months they have been getting direct words of God to them through Moses. God spoke directly to them: *Dear Israel, this is what I want from you...*

And all this, is evidently, at this moment, totally gone from their minds.

And so they (and this is probably the worst part) take off their *gold rings* and their earrings and the silver caps off their teeth and their medallions and the rednecks took off their big shiny belt buckles and they melt 'em down and make a golden calf with it... ***Here's the kicker: do you remember where they got those?*** God gave them to them as a type of wedding present when they left Egypt!

- Right before they left Egypt, God did one little extra credit thing for them... He puts this spell over all the Egyptians where they give Israel all their gold jewelry, freely. They're like "Hey, I know we all hate each other, but since you're leaving... let me give you my gold watch." ... *And now they taking that stuff that God gave them and melting it down to make another god? The insult of this...* it would be like

my wife hocking her wedding ring to pay for a hotel where she can have an affair with another man.

So, ***how is this happening, after all they've seen?*** Watch this...

⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to (to whom?) the Lord." ⁶ And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. (which are the names of the offerings and the sacrifices that God had instructed them about in chapter 29).

- OK, listen, I don't want to excuse what Israel did... but I do want to explain it, so that you don't just dismiss it as completely unbelievable and not at all something you can relate to.
- Israel, you see, was in a time of great anxiety... Moses has been gone longer than he was supposed to, and some of the Israelites had started to wonder if he was coming back.
 - These were people with families; they are standing in the middle of a desert, with no homes and no jobs. The manna and quail are great... but everybody knows that at any moment the manna could dry up and the quail could quit falling from the sky.
 - They feel exposed, vulnerable, and scared. They had families!
- And further, you see that what they are doing is not an outright rejection of God, but a way of supplementing their worship. They didn't say, "God, we hate you... Let's be atheists."
 - No, **vs. 5** says they declared this as a "feast to the Lord." In **v. 4** Aaron says to them, "These are your gods." (Plural? The calf... **and** Jehovah.)
 - The calf, you see, is not so much a replacement of God; it is a supplement **to** God.
- The calf was something familiar to them. The calf is what the Egyptians had worshipped; and what many of them had worshipped before they left. The calf-god is what they used to trust in.

In a time of fear, they were hedging their bet with something familiar.

Do you see the relevance to you, now? In a time of fear (anxiety), we return to the 'old gods' in which we used to trust. We'll come back to this. But first, let's finish the story.

And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. (walk it out) ⁷ And the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt (whose people? Who brought them out of Egypt? God is ticked... He doesn't even want to claim them anymore), have corrupted themselves..."

And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people.

This is a great, though awkward image of disobedience...

- **Everyone stiffen their necks.**
- **story:** me with Ted Haggard. As he got louder, he pushed. "HS, that doesn't feel like you... I'm pushing back!" I stiffened my neck... little war going on... I'm sure he thought, "what a stiffnecked guy!" this is what God says they are doing with Him. Stiffening of the neck...

⁸ 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."

God's done with it. He's ready to cut bait, expunge these guys as a factory defect and start over with Moses.

Strange? In actuality, He's not, God never intended to cut them off; God knows that these are not Moses' people and that Moses didn't bring them up... He's testing Moses, and Moses passes with flying colors:

⁹ 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? **you** hearing this? This is almost irreverent! Moses is correcting God!

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.' "

- If you wanna know how to pray, here it is. God created a situation in which he'd teach Moses how to pray. Moses says: "God, you started this... the glory of your name is at stake, so you better finish it."

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... 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."

- Joshua is like... I hear this terrible noise, are the people in pain? No, wait, that's not battle music, that's disco. Is that a strobe light? Is that a mechanical bull?

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.

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.

- I can't imagine this was good for ye olde digestive tract; in fact, scholars tell us it would have been fatal for those who drank it.

There's a lesson here about idolatry that is being taught that is just too good to pass up, so I have to point it out, even though it is off topic. When they took this god into them, it killed them. Any god that would kill you if you really obtained it is not really a god worth serving. God is the bread of life, when you get Him, you live; when you get false idols, they kill you... They fail to satisfy you and a lot of them just rot you on the inside if you ever get them. Sexual gratification just requires more and more; power and money corrupt people who get them. (the moment a person becomes a celebrity is the same moment he/she becomes a monster... perfectly normal people who become just total jerks when they get rich and famous)

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 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.' (Do you hear that? He just blamed Moses... "It's actually you're fault, Moses... you were the one who brought them out of Egypt. It's the people's fault... and, it's your fault, Moses!" Do you know who Aaron sounds like here? Adam, in the Garden of Eden. "It's not my fault. It was her, the woman you gave to me, God!")

But it gets better: 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 his calf!" Is Aaron in middle school? "Yeah, I just walked out of the store, and the candy was in my pocket... I have no idea how it got there!"

And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose...) (see how the Bible is not letting Aaron off the hook?) 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.

- Be serious... Imagine how bitter this was! Priests were supposed to help the people; to minister to the people; to help them with their hurts and struggles; and here they are commanded to punish the people, severely.
- I know this confuses some of you... why would God order something like that? And I understand that... I don't have time to explain it here, but just let me say this: The point here is that *they had to see the severity of sin. God to wake them up to the harm idolatry would do in their lives, so people died.*
 - This is not the way we do things now... I hope that is obvious. Nobody dies here in church. I'm not going to send out the staff with swords in the middle of a message.
 - But the point, for now (we'll come back to this) is God is wanting to wake them up to the severity of sin.

³¹ So Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Alas, this people have sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. ³² But now, if you will, please forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written."

OK... so let me teach you what, I believe, this story means and its significance here in the story of Israel's coming to know God.

This is the picture of the "normal" Christian life.

You see, this story, I believe, is told in a way that parallels the pattern of the first sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden:

- Just like in the Garden, God is temporarily absent;
- And so the people doubt God's goodness and His word, just like Adam and Eve did in the Garden.

- They are afraid, and so they cling to something familiar and tangible in the place of God—for Adam and Eve it was the tree, and for them the golden calf.
- And you know how Genesis says that the result of Adam and Eve’s sin was that they felt naked? Moses says that the people “broke loose” (v. 25), which in Hebrew is a play off the word “naked” (they share the same Hebrew root word.)

he point is this: **Even after they are saved (delivered), they are repeating the pattern of the first sin.** This will be the struggle for them, and for all saved people, for the rest of their lives.

is my story. It describes the process of sanctification, a big word theologians use to describe our growth in Godliness.

and here are the lessons for us... I have 2 for you; and 5 for me:

1) In times of stress, fear, or worry, we return to the gods in which we are most familiar trusting.

When you are scared, under stress, fear, you return to old habits and old idolatries.

All of you, before you were saved (before you knew God) had sinful patterns in your lives; idolatries: things you trusted in, things you sought after, things that gave your life meaning, more than God did... And for many of you, you’ve never expunged some of those old idolatries, you’ve just buried them under religion. And in times of stress, pressure, loneliness, fear... you return to them.

- Remember, the calf was what they had worshipped in Egypt; they didn’t want to reject God, they just wanted to depend on it alongside of God!

What do you tend to trust in alongside of God? About what do you think, “I know I need God in my life, but I also need that for life to be ok.”

If you want to know, just look at where you most reflexively turn in times of stress and fear.

- In a time of great stress, where do you turn? Drugs, alcohol or pornography. Those are a type of medication for you.
- For some of you, to escape the stress of a bad home life, you bury yourself in your work (or your schoolwork). If I can be great, then this stuff won’t matter as much.
- When you feel threatened, to what do you turn for defense and protection? What do you think, “OK, as long as I got that, everything will be ok.”
 - For many of you, your mind goes right to your bank account. And you think, “OK, as long as I am financially secure than ultimately I am secure and I’m going to be ok.”
- Or, when you feel threatened because others are upset at you... what is it that you turn to, to tell yourself you’re ok? You think, “Well, they may not like me, but I’m a good person (even if they can’t see it); I’m smart; I have a lot of potential; I’m a good mother; I’m religious.” You think, “Because this thing is true about me I have worth.”

- These are old idolatries, and they have been papered over with religion, and they resurface under pressure.
- Here’s another way: What brings out the worst in you? What puts you on edge? What causes you to lose your temper or be afraid? That pressure is revealing your idolatry.
 - When your finances are sketchy;
 - Others not happy with you;
 - For some of you, what really messes you up and puts you on edge is when you hear about one of your rivals doing well? (for some of you, your whole day can be ruined when you hear about someone you inwardly compete with doing well)!
 - Maybe family or relational problems just devastate you.
 - Fear, and worry, and your temper, reveal what you trust in... because you think, “I can’t lose that and life be ok.”
- Or here’s another way of approaching the question: “Which unanswered prayers have really bothered you?” For these people

they were upset that Moses was gone... Which things have you asked God for that He hasn't given you and you are really angry with Him about it?

- Maybe: you're still single; your stocks crashed.
- You say, 'Is there anything wrong with being disappointed the way things happened?' Of course not. But we're talking about more than just disappointment.
 - Sometimes you pray and work for something and you don't get it... and you're disappointed but you move on.
 - But sometimes you pray and work for something and you don't get it—you're bitter; you despair. That's what reveals the idolatry.

Here is the point: Times of fear or stress or anxiety cause old idolatries that still grip our souls to resurface... it's like scent of death still inside of you that gets stirred up when the heat is on...

Quit blaming the situation for your problems... These people are like, "Well Moses, it's your fault! You were gone and we felt afraid!"

- Moses' absence is not what caused this situation; the idolatry of their hearts caused it. Moses absence just revealed it.
- **Cup...** Why is there water in the floor? "Because you knocked the cup over." No...because here, I have an identical cup and I will knock it over and look, no water. You said that there is water on the floor because I knocked the cup over but look: (knock empty cup over). I knocked the cup over and... no water. No, there is water on the floor because there was water in the cup. Here's the point: we tend to blame our reactions, bad attitudes, our sin, on what is happening to us: Life is knocking me around...my marriage is bad; people don't appreciate me; I've been done wrong at work. **Life's knocks don't create the problem, they only reveal it.**

You see, we all say that Jesus is our savior, but when life knocks you, what spills out? **This is something you must continually be**

asking. Where does the trail of your worry, fear, stress... where does it lead back to? These are your idolatries.

- **This is the question: What is inside of you?**
 - **Where does your mind go when it idles?** Remember I told you that what you most love is revealed by your dreams. What does your mind drift effortlessly to... What do you enjoy daydreaming about?
 - Do you think up scenarios for career advancement
 - Getting revenge on someone? Somebody wrongs you or shames you and you are dominated every day thinking about getting revenge on that person
 - Maybe you daydream about owning a particular home or type of car or some other material possession.
 - Or maybe you daydream about a relationship with somebody? Or, with *anybody*?
 - Wanting or desiring these things is not idolatry, thinking about them from time to time is not idolatry, but when they dominate your thinking and control your emotions and your moods more than God, it is idolatry.
 - **What do you spend most of your money on?** "Your money flows, effortlessly, to your greatest love." (Tim Keller) Most of us overspend on our kids, our clothes, or status symbols like cars and homes. Those are our idols.
- All these things reveal what is inside of you... and as I said a few weeks ago, these things are all like smoke from a fire at the altar of the god at which you've been worshipping.
- Don't just wave away the smoke and cover it up; put out the fire.
 - **Imagine in your house there was a fire... empty the cup; put out the fire; clean the dead rat out.** Make my point?

(2) We need to learn to live in God's presence even when we can't feel it

- Some of you say, "I can't feel God; I feel like I pray and He's silent I can't see Him or sense Him..."

In this story, they felt alone. Moses is gone too long. **Question: Were they really alone? No. But they couldn't feel Him... but He was right there.**

- We have God's presence with us, in a way they didn't: every believer in Jesus now possesses the Holy Spirit... (not one of those guys who believe only a few get Him) I can't always feel Him. And if you depend on always feeling God, you're going to feel lost and alone a lot of the time.
- This is a majorly important Biblical teaching: **the presence of God is perceived and grasped by faith, not feeling.**
 - God **had promised** them that He'd never leave them and always provide for them. And He'd proved that to them by these great, mighty displays of power. And in a time of darkness, **they were to trust what God had said and done, not what they were feeling or seeing at the moment.**
 - We are all prone to measure God by what we can see, rather than believing what He has said. **But in those times where we feel like we are in the dark, we must trust what God has showed us in the light.**
 - (Illus with my daughters... turn on the lights and tell them there is no monsters; later they are afraid again. I want to tell them: **Don't doubt in the dark what you saw in the light!**)
 - These people had seen the plagues and the Red Sea and heard God speak... but believe it or not, we have seen something that reveals God's compassion and His closeness even more: the cross! At the cross God showed us His love and power and commitment to us... and I know it seems like sometimes you God is absent, but the cross assures you that He is not. If God really loved you as much as the cross declared to you that He does, if His eye is on the sparrow, do you really think He's forgotten you?

- So, what do you do when you can't feel it? Believe what the light of the cross, not the darkness of your feelings, tell you.
- **3 guys on a wall...** Keep your faith on the facts of what Jesus has done for you, not your feelings. don't feel your way into your beliefs; believe your way...
- A practical way we try and encourage this: Keep the Word of God in front of you. A few really practical ways we try and get you to do that:
 - Daily time with God: every morning I remind myself of God's love for me and His power on my behalf. **Gospel prayer.** Nothing I could do... this is all I need for eternal joy... what the cross tells me about God's intentions for my life and my family and my children and you all is true...In the darkest days it floods my soul with light.
 - Prayer cards... I write out what I am asking God for and when God answers them
 - Be involved in a small group (Heb 3:14)
 - Why we take communion together often and tell you to come faithfully.
- **We encourage these things not because I want to fill up your calendar; but because I want to fill you up with the promises of God... so that when life shakes you, you spill out God's promises; when life cuts you, you bleed God's word.**

There's your two. Now, I told you the next 5 points were for me (they'll be quick because I'm a quick learner... and this is the 2nd time I've heard this sermon), but they are for me because in this story you see the absolute failure of the religious leader, Aaron.

I told you in this story Aaron is like Adam, the original spiritual leader who failed. And there are some crucially important lessons here for

pastors and spiritual leaders, so I need you to listen to me preach to myself for a few minutes:

3) I can't just give people what they want to hear each week

The people didn't want to hear the promises of God from Aaron; they wanted permission to worship their idols. Aaron caved, and as a result he had a big congregation, and his approval index really high, but he led them to their death!

- I can't just give you what you want to hear each week. You need me to stand up here unafraid to say unpopular things. I can't be like Aaron; I've got to lead by conviction, not by popular opinion.
- And you need to leave ticked off sometimes; if not, there is no way I'm doing my job. Idolatry is too deep within us not to think that a man with the message of God will not constantly be exposing you and rebuking you and yes, it will be painful.
- Aaron has his own idol in this whole story, which religious leaders often struggle with: the praise of people.
 - Listen, I've said this before: If a pastor depends on the praise of people, he will dilute the message... **and people will die because of it.**
 - Guys, I have One audience I must please, and you must pray for my heart to stay faithful to Him.

4) I can't celebrate your salvation when you are still in sin

There is a tendency, especially in churches like ours, for pastors to be concerned simply with the number of baptisms; the number of people sitting in the seats; the number of people giving; the numbers of decisions being made. And yes, those are the criteria by which success is most easily measured.

But I can't be joyful that you all have prayed a prayer when you're still serving for and seeking after and consumed with money more than you are God; when you are still more excited about a new car than you are seeing churches planted and poor children fed in

India; I can't be excited that you've prayed a prayer when you are still practicing immorality or getting drunk all the time.

- I've got to keep pushing you to confront your idolatry and your sin. And you're going to say to me, "J.D., leave us alone... and you're going to threaten to go to another church because there are a lot of churches where they won't preach to you about this stuff... but I'm not doing it! Because I love you and I want you to serve no other gods but God in your life.

(I say for me... but obviously, they are for any Christian leader)

(5) I can't be happy simply because you outwardly are keeping the commandments

- Moses had given them the commandments, and for a few chapters, they'd stopped sinning! They were living in obedience, but they hadn't dealt with their underlying idolatry, and so in a time of fear, their idolatry resurfaced.
- If I'm only focusing on your behavior, and I get you to stop sinning and obey the rules and be "good little Christians," I'm not dealing with the root of your sin, and that is that your heart loves and trust certain things more than God... sometimes good things.
- Growth in the Christian life is called "sanctification," and get this: **Sanctification is not just stopping sinful habits; it is removing anything that competes for your allegiance to Jesus.** It's not just have you quit drinking or sleeping with your girlfriend... it's about removing anything in your heart that competes with Jesus. So, I have got to press the Gospel down until it hits what you love and trust in. and yes, it's painful and yes, you almost need to be in a small group to realize what they are.

(6) I can't treat sin as if it has no consequence

- I have to show you that sin has consequences. It's not popular to talk about the righteousness and judgment of God, but we have to do it.
- How do we do that? Again, it's not done the same way it is here in this chapter. No staff with swords.

- My way, the Gospel way, is to preach the cross to you... To tell you of what God did to Jesus in your place, in an attempt to wake you up.
 - And that's why I preach so often on the cross... a lot... People are like, "I don't want to hear about it... it's so bloody." That's the point.
 - I've described to you, in detail, the horrors of Gethsemane and the cross... Mark says that in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus shrunk back in fear and horror... it was not because of the physical pain he was about to experience, but because of the prospect of bearing our sin and being separated from God. I have to keep that in front of you!
 - Listen, you have an extraordinary opportunity right now... and that is that you can be awakened to the wickedness and danger of sin through Jesus' death, and not your own.
 - Here, at the first preaching of the law, 3000 people were killed in judgment.
 - In Acts 2, when Peter first preached the Gospel, the "new law," 3000 were saved because Jesus was judged in their place.
 - In Exodus 32, they saw the fire of God's presence up on the mountain and they feared and people died; in Acts 2, they felt the fire of God's presence within and through the blood of Jesus they rejoiced and were healed.
 - So, wake up! This is an extraordinary moment for all of mankind! If you don't awaken and repent at the preaching of Christ's judgment in your place, there will be no hope to save you from the wrath to come.

7) I have to point you to Jesus, not me.

- The last scene with Moses in this chapter is set up as a contrast with Aaron.
 - Aaron throws the people under the bus to protect himself.

- Moses, by contrast, so identifies with the people that he would die *for* them.
- That's the kind of leader I want to be. I want to be the leader who loves you so much that I would die in your place if I could
 - But listen... ultimately, this is not about Moses, because Moses would fail them too.
 - He does later (Numbers). He loses his temper with them and fails them and is not allowed to go into the Promised Land with them.
- There's only one leader you can ever really depend on, fully, to love and lead you. It's not Moses; it's not me. It is Jesus. He is the one who not just offered to die in your place but did die in your place; He's the one who stayed faithful to you to the bitter end.
- Moses let His people down; I will let you down... He never will Put your faith in Him, not in me. Build your Christianity on Christ, not on the pastor or the church.

I hope the applications of this message are obvious. If not, go back and listen to it again.

Prayer:

Bullpen:

- ((**Chronicles of Narnia: The Silver Chair** there is a boy named Eustace and a girl named Jill, and a strangel little creature called a marshwiggles named Puddleglum. Marshwiggles are green and web-footed, and swampy. (Like a little miniature Swamp Things) Puddleglum, the marshwiggles, is a faithful companion who helps the children as they go on a quest to save Prince Rilian, who has been kidnapped by a witch and enchanted. And they go through all kinds of adventures to rescue him. They finally find him in the Underland which is a series of underground caverns that the witch rules over. Just as they are freeing Prince Rilian, the witch enters the room and lights a magic fire on the ground. She begins to play a harp and speak very sweetly to them. As the smoke from the magic fire begins to mess with their minds, the witch starts talking to them and asking them questions, they begin to doubt that the world they came from is real. They begin to doubt everything that they know is true... and she begins to convince them that this underworld is all that exists, all that matters, and that she is the kind ruler they should serve. And at that moment, when all seems lost, Puddleglum, the faithful marshwiggles, musters up all of his willpower and marches over to the fire. With his bare feet he stomps out the fire, burning his foot but putting out the flames, and everyone begins to awaken. **C.S. Lewis** says, as they smelled the burning flesh of Puddleglum's foot, they began to awake, because, "there is nothing enchanting about the smell of burnt marshwiggles."¹))

Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit in *Idolatry*: "the central principle of the Bible is the rejection of idolatry."
Rejoicing and repentance go together.

First heard Josh Harris share this story in sermon in Proverbs, "Not slothful in α l."

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- Or, here's another one... even after you're a Christian: **What do you spend most of your money on?** "Your money flows, effortlessly, to your greatest love." (Tim Keller) Most of us overspend on our kids, our clothes, or status symbols like cars and homes. Those are our idols.
- Now that you're a Christian: Where does your mind go when it idles? Remember I told you that what you most love is revealed by your dreams. What does your mind drift effortlessly to... What do you enjoy daydreaming about?
 - Do you think up scenarios for career advancement
 - Getting revenge on someone? Movie: somebody wrongs you or shames you and you are dominated every day thinking about getting revenge on that person.
 - Maybe you daydream about owning a particular home or type of car or some other material possession.
 - Or maybe you daydream about a relationship with somebody?
 - Wanting or desiring these things is not idolatry, thinking about them from time to time is not idolatry, but when they dominate your thinking and control your emotions and your moods more than God, it is idolatry.

You have something greater than all that Moses was able to see! Even after the mighty displays of power and the clear instructions from God and the tabernacle with God right in their midst, the people could not keep the first law. It brought death. The second law was given after the death of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit and 3000 people were saved.

Two Jewish philosophers: Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit in *Idolatry*: “the central principle of the Bible is the rejection of idolatry.” It is in every story.

Anxiety... (see stuff in Paul Miller *A Praying Life* book)

When you see God, and then go right back to what you’ve seen.

Presence leads to change. No change, no presence.

Paul’s prayer... that you will know the love and power of God

Yann and the chimney or rock climbing illustration

Was not so much a rejection of God as it was a supplement to God; a fallback.

Three months after their departure from Egypt, the Israelites arrive at the Desert of Sinai, at the base of Mount Sinai. What they had seen:

- Plagues
 - Passover
 - Red Sea
 - Manna (golden grahams) and 3x providing water out of a rock, including one where he made a salt water fountain a fresh one
 - When sick of bread and water, quail
 - Victory in battle over a larger enemy
 - Thunder and lightning and other paranormal phenomena
 - Direct revelations through Moses
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- Repent of the idolatry causing those things.
 - This story shows me that the rest of my life I need to be re-examining my heart, looking for where my idols are surfacing and dealing with them. John Calvin said “the human heart was an idol factory.” Martin Luther said that “all of a Christian’s life is one of repentance.”