

Week 7 | Aaron | DT

I have some great news – our auditorium is pretty full on Sundays. We're currently working on building up volunteer teams so we can move to two Gatherings in August. Until then, let's continue to arrive at our Gathering early and choose seats in the middle of each row so seats are available for first-time visitors. We're full, 2 gatherings in August. Moving forward with volunteer teams, until then, we're packing in, great energy.

Alright - now if you have a Bible we'll be in **Exodus 32**.

As you're turning there, we're continuing the story we left off on last week. Last week we looked at **Exodus 3**. God shows up to Moses at the burning bush and wants Moses to free the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Moses has all these arguments and pushbacks as to why he doesn't want to do it. Then at the very end of the conversation - Moses is like "No but seriously, God, send someone else." And God says, "Ok, you know your big brother Aaron? He'll go with you to make sure Israel goes free." Aaron becomes a big deal in the Bible because he eventually becomes what's called the High Priest. And the high priest did two things:

- 1 - presented God to the people - teaching and worship**
- 2 - presented the people to God - forgiveness and sacrifice**

And then, as you read on in the text, that's what happens. God's people get freed from Egypt. Pharaoh and his army are defeated. And now Israel is celebrating. God is visibly at work. In Exodus 19 God's people arrive at mount Sinai, just like God promised in Exodus 3. In Exodus 20 God gives them the 10 commandments and God begins telling them "I want to dwell with you forever. I want you to bless the world...here's how I want you to do it."

What I'm saying is...big things are happening. And when you get to **Exodus 32**, we see things go off the rails pretty quickly. And it's one of the more bizarre stories in the Torah. It gets a little R-rated.

Exodus 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."

So uh oh. I don't know if you caught that...but Moses is on Mt. Sinai and the people are getting impatient. To remind us, God JUST rescued his people out of Egypt like a little over a month ago. God JUST performed supernatural things right in front of them. And now some time has passed and they're like "Hey what the heck."

Parents of young kids in the room, it's like, if you could imagine with me, you give your kids a gift they really want or you surprise them with something they love and they're like, "Oh this is the best. You're the best. I love you so much!" They give you hugs. It's so cute. And then an hour later you tell them to do something they don't want to do and they throw a temper tantrum and say "This is the worst day of my life!" Like, parents, hypothetically...could you imagine that? Young kids in the room, that sounds crazy...right?

But that's kinda what's happening here. God had been performing some of the most incredible miracles in the entire Bible. The people celebrate and soon after they get impatient. And they walk up to Moses' big brother, the high priest, and say, "Hey man, do something. Give us something to worship."

Now here's why that's a big deal...in Exodus 20, the 10 commandments...God gives 10 commands on how all-humans for all-time are supposed to live in relationship with God and others. **Commandment number 1** - which

I'd argue is like THE MOST important - don't worship other gods. YHWH alone is supreme. And coming in at a close 2nd place, **command number 2** - God says don't make any images or idols of me.

Now why's that big deal? Because commandment number one is about worshipping the wrong god. Commandment number two is about worshipping the right God but in the wrong way. Commandment number two was, basically, all about trying to manipulate or control God. Here's what I mean:

Images and idols were statues made of rock or wood - and people would make them to look like what they thought their god looked like. And they sort of served as this gateway between heaven and earth. If you performed enough for your god, that god's presence would inhabit the statue and you could ask your god for whatever you wanted - whether it's protection, or family, or food, or victory in war. Idol worship was about manipulating god to do what you wanted to do.

And God's like, "Nope. That's not how I work. You don't tell me what I'm like, I tell you what I'm like." And "I want to enter into a genuine relationship with you. So you don't get to manipulate me or control me."

That's why, if you read on in **Exodus 20**, God connects violating these commandments to hating him. Because it's an insult to the relationship. It's saying "God what you are and who you are is not enough. I want you to be like this. And I want you to do this for me." God says that's hating him.

Timothy Keller calls this creating "counterfeit gods." A counterfeit is something that looks like the real thing... but is actually a knock-off. Maybe from far away it looks genuine but the closer you look the more you're like...oh no. That ain't it.

- **Sneakers** - look like Nikes, but you get closer, the I is replaced with an O. Nokes. Ew. Worthless.
- **Impossible burger** - plant-based meat. It looks like meat. If you close your eyes it might smell like a burger. But it's not a burger. It's a knock-off. What are we doing? Don't tell me, "Well plant-based burgers have gotten a lot better over time. 'Big Burger' has caught up - it's like, 'Sure ok.'"
- **\$10 bill** - You get closer, it reads, "Wanna know what's worth way more? Eternal life." You raise your fist to the air, "Christiaaaaaans!"
 - What I'm saying is, it's not the real thing. It's an imitation.

That is what Israel is doing here. They request for Aaron to make an idol - they're making a counterfeit God. It's worthless. It's not the real thing.

Exodus 32:2

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."

Seems like a weird detail, but this is the gold that Israel took from the Egyptians right before they fled Egypt. All the rich Egyptians as they were leaving gave all their gold and jewelry to Israel. So think about it, you have all these tangible reminders of what God JUST did for you and your family. And you give it away to do something God despises. What is happening!?

It's like parents, hypothetically, let's say you give a gift to your kid. And they're so thankful. And then soon after they use it to beat up their siblings. That's not what that gift was made for. The gift was an expression of your love to them and now they're using it to destroy relationship. Again...hypothetically, you could imagine?

Exodus 32:3-4

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.

Now, why a calf? Like they don't even deliberate over "okay, so what image should we make of God? Aaron just takes the gold and it's like he instinctively knew what to do.

1 - the bull in the ancient near east was a symbol of strength and power. And, if you think about the position the

Israelites were in, this is exactly the type of god they would want.

Remember, Moses - their leader - is up on the mountain and he's delayed for whatever reason. They don't know what has happened to him. He might be dead for all they know. And so if you're them, you don't know what's gonna happen to you. And you begin the question God. God's not answering on the timeline you wanted him to. God's not doing things the way you expect him to, so you're feeling weak and powerless and vulnerable...so I need an idol to feel in control and manipulate god to do something I want...I want to feel powerful and in control. And what would that look like in this culture? A bull.

2 - Do you know which nation worshipped a golden calf? Egypt!! The nation they just left, the nation God just overthrew worshipped the golden calf. God has gotten Israel out of Egypt. But there is still a lot of Egypt left in Israel. Think about it, Israel's only been free a couple months. But they've lived in Egypt surrounded by these false gods for 400 some-odd years. They've been inoculated by their environment for so long to where, EVEN AFTER God shows up and does these miraculous signs right in front of them, it's not enough. They still default back to the way things were.

But wait it gets weirder...

Exodus 32:4-6

And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"

Wait. What?

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.

That word "play" is the Hebrew word **tsikah**. Can you say that word with me? Our English translations of the Bible pretty that word up to say "rose up to play" - who doesn't love to play? Aw. In reality though, **tsikah**, "rose up to play" is Hebrew expression that carries sexual connotations associated with pagan ritual practices.

So you basically thousands of people make an image of God into a big golden cow, the begin worshipping it and then in an attempt to manipulate and control their god, and then they **tsikah**. They rise up to play. But they're not playing a volleyball or four square. No, they all get publicly drunk and begin sleeping with each other out in the open. Again, WHAT IS HAPPENING!?

And before you brush that off, it's not that much different to what millions of people do today every weekend at bars, or clubs, or parties. Probably not every part of it out in the open but you get it.

Exodus 32:7-8

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

Verse 7 - They corrupted themselves. Verse 8 - they turned aside quickly.

And when you step back you have to ask - two questions.

1 - why did the people do this? Think of all they had just seen and experienced. The plagues. They saw each one of them. Just like, a couple months ago. They walked across the Red Sea as the water parted. Then watched as the waters came back together and drowned the Egyptians.

2 - Why does Aaron go along with it? After all he's the guy put in charge to tell God's people what God is supposed to be like, but he just goes with the flow. He's like "Yeah whatever y'all wanna do."

But then again, he's the high priest - the one the ppl were to look up to. The one who was supposed present God to the people and the present the people to God!

This instance in Exodus 32 is a constantly repeated event throughout the OT. In fact, it's probably most accurate to say that this event serves as the pattern of all of Israel's sin and rebellion and susceptibility to be affected by the nations around them.

The answer is the Torah is trying to expose to us how easy it is to forget who God is. It doesn't matter whether you're Israel or Aaron. There are pressures both outside of you and pressures within you that make you and me susceptible to caving in and forgetting about YHWH.

Why make a false image? Because it was normal at the time.

Why a golden calf? Because that's what everyone else did.

Why worship and get drunk and sleep around? Because they were brought up to believe that way.

This story is trying to show us one of the easiest ways to become a ghost is to simply go along with your environment. It's a slow drift.

I think about how as human beings, we're all prone to this. Prone to just give in to what our environment tells us to think or live, and not really question it.

I'll give you a few case studies:

Elevator experiment - the elevator door opens and everyone inside the elevator is in on the experiment and they're facing the wrong way. The person just boarding the elevator isn't aware of the experiment at all - and near every single time, that person will do a double-take and also face the wrong way.

Here's another one:

Asch Conformity Experiment - Solomon Asch in 1951. Which line on the right is the same as the line on the left? Not a trick question. C. No in this experiment it was very similar as the elevator one. A group of people are asked the question, but the first 9 people are in on it and all say the same wrong answer very confidently - to where when it gets to the last person they get very confused. And here's what's wild - 75% of the time, the last person, the one who isn't in on what's happening, will say the wrong answer. 75%!

Now part of me wanted to pull like most of you aside and give you a heads up to say the wrong answer just to see what would happen - but you know. That would take a long time. But...you can imagine if I did, right? It's not lying, it's an experiment. It's different.

Ok last one and this one's pretty infamous:

Stanford Prison Experiment - conducted by psychology professor **Philip Zimbardo in 1971**, selected a handful of ivy-league, mentally-sound college students and randomly picked which ones would play the role of a prison guard and which ones would play the role of a prisoner. The experiment was supposed to last two weeks and was designed to see - what would happen when people were given power. Would they use it for good or evil?

So the study goes, those who were prisoners were "arrested" from their home and put in the basement of one of the student buildings. You know what they found? Those who took the role of the prison guards, eventually began to abuse and humiliate the prisoners. The experiment ended after only six days.

Dr. Zimbardo later published a book called *The Lucifer Effect* - where he summarized this study and came to the conclusion that our social dynamics, our surroundings can so easily influence and bring out the worst in people - often without even realizing it. Whether it's the prison experiment, or corporate greed, or racism, or war.

Time and time again, we see how easy it is to just go along with our environment even when something in our gut says, "Oh, this is wrong....right?" But when it becomes the water you're swimming in, you become used to it. You don't even notice it most of the time and it's just normalized.

This explains why some of the worst atrocities committed by human beings, if you look back at history, happened because that was the norm at the time or because of that slow drift to go with the flow and not question things.

So my oldest, she's nine, she's learning about America's history with slavery and racism. And she was saying the other day how sad it made her feel and said, "I can't believe people had slaves a couple hundred years ago. Why would they do that?" I was like "well yea that was normal for them. they didn't think it was wrong. its like a fish in water. they don't know what water is, they're just used to it"

And the thing is, its always easier things like that the further you distance yourself from it. I mean, we're over 3,000 years removed from this story in Exodus, and so for us it's easy to see how out of hand and almost silly it seems... but the closer you are to it it becomes harder to see. Because it seems normal.

So how do we apply a wild text like this to us? Well, two things.

First, I think its worth asking...what are the **external pressures** in our time and place that could negatively impact our following Jesus? What are the things happening around us that seem altogether normal that, in reality, could cause that slow drift in our lives - and turn us into ghosts?

I've got a few things - and it's worth noting - that a number of these things aren't inherently sinful per se - but if you're not aware of the power of them, can become idols in your lives.

Materialism

We live in a society that is obsessed with material possessions. We have more storage, more waste, more consumption, more spending than any civilization in human history.

But then, Jesus says that a person's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions, that we should find joy in living open handed with our material possessions and being generous. Which means, if your relationship with possessions and money and things is not noticeably different when compared to what is normal around you...it's happening to you.

I'll give you another one.

Worry

We live in one of the most worried societies in world history. The research is in. While we have a higher standard of living comparatively with a much much lower rate of catastrophe, we worry more than people who live in situations where their lives are routinely threatened. Worry is so normal around us we act like you shouldn't tell someone to stop worrying. "Stop worrying." "you shouldn't say that, that's not helpful! That's insensitive."

Well...that's exactly what Jesus said. Don't worry, because of course, you know the God in charge of everything and he loves you. Your worry is neither productive nor necessary. It literally doesn't change anything that is happening.

Ok, so listen. If your volume level of worry does not look noticeably different when compared to what is normal around us...it's happening to you. It's no different than the golden calf.

Sexuality

We live in a time and place that disagrees with God on sexuality... and in some ways is directly hostile to what God says... So the way you handle yourself when it comes dating and marriage and sex should be observably different from what is normal around us.

Tech

Politics

I'll bring this one up since it's an election year and I know it's gonna drive me crazy. That is not a sphere that prioritizes love of enemy. Jesus says we are to love, pray for and bless our enemies. I'm not a fan of thinking of a fellow countryman as an enemy no matter what they think politically but even if you do...love, prayer and blessing are how we behave towards them. So our involvement in politics, in whatever ways we choose to be involved, ought have us looking quite different in comparison. I'll say it differently, if you have allegiance to any political party without questions, comments, or concerns - then give it time - and you will slowly drift into becoming a ghost.

Now I could go on but, again, so we're clear - not all those things are inherently sinful. I'm not saying you're wrong

if you have a smart phone or have nice stuff or are into politics - what I am saying is, if you're not aware of their power - they can easily lull you into someone who forgets about the power and goodness of God. They can easily become idols in your life.

I also just want to comment - just like my daughter saw something 200 years ago like slavery and was horrified that people used to do that, I just want to say, let's not kid ourselves and think that 200 years from now, people won't look at us and what we tolerated and endorsed in 2024 and be horrified by it too. Let's not kid ourselves to think we're the first culture in human history to have it all figured out.

What are the external pressures that make you susceptible to making idols?

We need to be aware of that because the call for us is to be set apart from the world. To be holy. As the New Testament says, **In the world but not of the world**. To love and follow King Jesus and reject the external pressures out there. To be aware of the power idols have in our lives and to say "I will choose to follow the way of Jesus because He's far better."

And in turn, we get to show the world that there is a better way to live. We don't judge the world we, like Jesus are called to love the world - to not huddle ourselves away and look down on others but to invite people into the way of Jesus. To show others that the power of God is far better than following the power of idols. And yes, that will mean at times you come across as a little weird to your friends and neighbors but it's for your good and their good too. I'm not interested in us being weird for weirds sake. I've seen from time to time that's where Christians go so far the other way. **[Story of cheesy T-shirts - not knocking all of it, but if the summation how you stand out as a Christian is primarily by your T-shirts, then something might be off.]** Winsomely weird.

So that's the first way we can apply this text - to be aware of the external pressures around you. But real quick, a second way to apply this text - is to be aware of internal pressures within you to turn to idols. Here's what I mean - look back at **v.1**

Exodus 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."

What triggered them to turn to idols?

Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain. The guy who God put in charge was not meeting the expectations of the people. They got impatient. They grew frustrated. They wanted God to meet their agenda and when God didn't do that, that's when things spiraled so out of control.

So I think it's appropriate to ask when God doesn't meet your expectations - **what idols do you turn to? When things aren't going the way you want and God doesn't seem like He's answering you the way you want Him to - what are the counterfeit gods you create?**

Because like Israel in the wilderness, when we're feeling weak and afraid, helpless and vulnerable - its so easy to run to something else outside of God to help us feel strong, powerful, and in control of our lives.

Whether that's sex or money. Whether that's food or entertainment. Whether that's work or family. Whether its business or materialism or scrolling social media. We will run to something to give ourselves the illusion of control. And yet, all of those things, most of which aren't inherently sinful per se - never deliver on what we think they promise. Like Israel, our **idols and counterfeit gods only lead to sin and death.**

And what you and I need is a great high priest, we need a better Aaron.

We need a great high priest who can truly represent God to the people. A priest who shows us what God is really like - to not offer up some fake imitation knockoff - but to accurately show us who this God of Scripture is and how to worship Him and live for Him alone.

What you and I need is a great high priest, a better Aaron, **who can truly represent the people to God.** To present our sin before God and offer atonement and forgiveness for all the ways we fall short. To offer up a

sacrifice for our sin so that we can be made right with God.

This is why in the New Testament, and especially the book of Hebrews, talks about Jesus. He's the better Aaron. The great high priest who truly shows us what God is like by coming down not as an idol or a statue but as a person. Jesus says, "You want to know what God is really like? Look to me." Jesus is the great high priest who goes before us to atone for our sins - offering himself as the last and final sacrifice so that we can be made right with God.

And Jesus is the great and final high priest who conquers death and now invites us into this life of worship with Him.

I'm reminded of the old hymn "Before the Throne." I want to invite you to look at the screen and follow along and meditate on these words:

Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea
A great High Priest whose name is love
Who ever lives and pleads for me
My name is graven on His hands
My name is written on His heart
I know that while in heav'n He stands
No tongue can bid me thence depart
No tongue can bid me thence depart
When Satan tempts me to despair
And tells me of the guilt within
Upward I look and see Him there
Who made an end to all my sin
Because the sinless Savior died
My sinful soul is counted free
For God the Just is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me
To look on Him and pardon me

This is our high priest. This is our better Aaron. He offers you love and life to the fullest now and forever. Will you lay down your idols and look on Him who pardoned you to be in relationship with you?

Pray
Communion