

- **III** – Have you ever broken something? Was it hard to fix?

When I was 16, I remember breaking a window. When I was 18, I remember breaking a car, for the first time... When some things are broken – like cars and windows – they can usually be fixed. But some broken things are not easy to fix. Like relationships.

Exodus 32 is about brokenness. Brokenness between us and God. I want us to think about this question today:

- **When I damage my relationship with God, how do I find healing?**

So let's turn to Exodus 32. The golden calf.

- 1. SIN: A broken commandment

Exodus 32 is about a broken commandment. Moses went up the mountain to get the 10 commandments from God. He was gone for 40 days and nights. A LONG time! Israel gets worried. Moses was the one who communicated with God on their behalf. And he was gone! Israel was feeling a bit lost. So, they take off all their gold earrings and melt them down to make a golden calf and say, in verse 4:

- *“These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”*

Without Moses around, they wanted an image of God to worship. So they make an image that suits them. And they break the 2nd commandment – Exodus 20:4 –

- *“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything...”*

They've made up an image of God which suits them. This is not about worshipping “other” gods. This is about worship their God, Yahweh, the one true God, but with an image that they've **made up**. But God won't allow that. So let's have a look at what happens to Israel when they make up their own image of God –

The Israelites worship this golden calf – they feast, they dance, and they sacrifice to the calf, and they indulge in revelry – sexual ‘carousing’. And God is angry.

- 2. ANGER – a broken relationship

God says to Moses, in verses 7-9:

- *“Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt... Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.”*

You see what God says to Moses? Moses, they’re “Your people” whom “You brought out of Egypt”. “They’re not **MY** people Moses, they’re YOUR people! I don’t want anything to do with them. Stand back! Because now I’m going to destroy YOUR people.”

Can you imagine a Father being so upset with his children that he says: “You’re not my children anymore.” And then saying: “I’m going to destroy them.” God is upset. He is angry. Because his people have ignored his commands. We don’t follow a God who says: “Don’t worry about it! No big deal. Broke a commandment. Not a problem. Let’s pretend it never happened.” No, we follow a God who **hates** sin. Who gets **angry** at sin. Who will **punish** sin. BUT... he is also a God who shows mercy:

- Verse 11: *“But Moses sought the favour of the LORD his God.”*

Moses seeks God’s favour. He says: “God, please don’t. Remember your promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. You’ve rescued them from the Egyptians. Please don’t destroy them now.”

And God “relents”. God DOESN’T destroy them. And this is a bit of a problem. **Does God change his mind?** Can God be persuaded by a man? Did Moses stop God making a terrible mistake?

No. This is not a change of mind. This is God **revealing himself** to us. This conversation between Moses and God reveal to us 3 very important things about God’s character:

1. We see how God really **feels** about sin – that he is fiercely angered by sin.
2. We see how God intends to **deal** with sin. By punishment – destruction and death.
3. Most importantly, we see God’s mercy. That despite his anger, He is merciful.

God doesn’t change his mind. He reveals his character to us. He shows us his anger at sin, the consequences of sin, and his mercy towards sinful people. And this is consistent with other parts of the Bible. For example, Ezekiel 33:14-15. God says:

- ¹⁴ *And if I say to the wicked man, ‘You will surely die,’ but he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right— ¹⁵ if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die.*

This is God’s character. Not to “change his mind”. But to show mercy. To forgive. God’s character is that he desires to see us change and repent from our sin. He doesn’t **desire** to destroy us. But he does take sin seriously.

But there's a fourth thing here that's important to notice. What is Moses doing? Moses **intercedes** for Israel. He's speaking to God on Israel's behalf. He's pleading with God to save his people. He's acting as a **mediator**. And it's interesting to look at Moses over the next few chapters. Let me briefly recap what happens next:

- Moses gets angry and smashes the 10 commandments. Verse 19:

"When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain."

- Then Moses destroys the calf. Verse 20:

²⁰ *And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.*

- Then Moses carries out God's punishment.

Moses instructs the Levites to go back and forth through the camp with their swords killing Israelites. Verse 28:

²⁸ *The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died.*

Moses mediates for God. He gets angry, he destroys the idol, and he punishes Israel.

But what happens next is perhaps the **most interesting** thing about this chapter. Moses is so horrified by what Israel has done, he has to do something. Look down with me at verse 30:

- *30 The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." 31 So Moses went back to the Lord and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. 32 But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written."*

Moses says to God: "Israel have done a terrible thing. And they must be punished. But punish me in their place." And God says – "I can't do that"

- *33 The Lord replied to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. ... when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin." 35 And the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.*

God says "Moses, you cannot take their punishment. **You** cannot make atonement for their sin. I will punish **them** for their own sin.

So... What does Exodus 32 say to us today?

- We have a God who hates sin and gets angry at sin.
- We have a God who punishes sin.
- And we are like Israel. We are people who sin. We are people who deserve punishment.

But there is a difference between us and Israel:

Israel had Moses. He led God's people out of slavery in Egypt and led them to the Promised Land. He interceded between God and Israel. He was their mediator.

We have Jesus. He led us out of slavery to sin and death, and promises us eternal life in the promised land of heaven. Jesus is our mediator. He is the one who intercedes for us with God the Father.

So what's the difference between Moses and Jesus?

Moses was unable to atone for Israel's sin. Moses could not take Israel's punishment on himself. Because Moses wasn't perfect himself. He does nearly everything Jesus does. But he cannot take Israel's punishment.

Jesus can. Jesus is not only our mediator, he is our atonement. He takes the punishment for our sin. Romans 3:25 –

²⁵ *God presented him (Jesus) as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.*

Jesus did what Moses couldn't – he takes the punishment from God that we deserve.

What does that mean for us today? Exodus 32 reminds us that we are sinful people, standing before a God who hates sin, is angered by sin, and will punish sin. But he is also a God of mercy. Exodus 32 shows us why we need Jesus – to do what Moses couldn't – to stand between us and God, to mediate, and to atone for our sin. Through Jesus, the sin is gone, the punishment is gone, and the brokenness is gone.

What about our other relationships here on earth? How do we deal with that brokenness? Well, the truth is – we cannot always heal that brokenness. Sometimes, human relationships cannot be repaired. Or at least not in the way we'd like them to be. Sometimes it takes a long time. Sometimes forever. But Jesus is still the answer to that brokenness too. **We** are mediators of Jesus' message of love and peace. We are his agents on this earth. By being LIKE Jesus, by showing his love, we bring the peace and healing of Jesus into our relationships. And that is the best chance we have, in this world, of finding healing in our human relationships.