

Hall of Shame - Aaron – Exodus 32

Hebrews 11:6 says, *“Without faith it is impossible to please God.”* Do you believe that? Then let me ask you a question. Why? Why is it impossible to please God if you don’t have faith? It is impossible to please God without faith because so much of who God is and what He does – His mannerisms and characteristics – are not physically provable. God is spirit. He is not physical like we are and while we can show evidence of God working in our lives, we can’t mathematically or scientifically prove much of anything about God.

God is invisible. God is not natural. He is supernatural and as such, people without faith don’t know He is there and some don’t want to know. Some people will always cling only to the natural. They can’t believe in anything they can’t see or feel or taste or smell. Until God chooses to reveal Himself to them in a big, big way, some people will never believe.

They cling to the natural by saying that the universe was created by a big bang. “Mother Nature” makes the sun rise and set each day and there is no life after death because you can’t prove Heaven and Hell in a lab. A lack of faith is always going to be a problem and it can even be a problem for Christians. As a believer we might have enough faith to believe that Jesus is the only way to Heaven and we might believe that he died for our sins but sometimes a lack of faith keeps us from growing spiritually and can even lead us away from what God wants for our lives and into sin.

If it happened to us, it wouldn’t be the first time it happened. In fact, a lack of faith was a big problem for the Israelite people in the wilderness as we will see in **Exodus chapter 32**. This is going to kick off a new sermon series called “Hall of Shame” where we look at some biblical characters who failed. Have you ever failed? Have you ever known what you needed to do but you failed to do it? Have you ever brought shame to yourself and your family? You are in good company.

How many of you were here last week for Easter Sunday? Wasn’t that a great day? Powerful worship and testimonies plus lots of fellowship and fun and it was a great day in the Lord’s house, right? And Satan hated it! He hated it so much, I’m willing to bet he attacked you right after somehow some way. And because the temptation was great, you failed. You sinned. You fell short. So, what do you do now? Give up? Lose the faith? Some folks do. Let’s see what happened to Aaron in the Old Testament. Aaron was the brother of Moses and while Moses was up on the mountain talking to God, Aaron was in charge.

My cousin has a saying at his house. Before he leaves every day, he tells his three young kids the one rule. *“Kids, what the one rule?”* Kids: *“Don’t do anything stupid.”* Well, Moses should have had that rule. Let’s read **Exodus 32:1-10**.

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him." 2 Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." 3 So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. 4 He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." 5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord." 6 So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry. 7 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. 8 They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' 9 "I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. 10 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."

This is one of many instances in their lives that a lack of faith became a problem for the Israelites but in this chapter it is even more incredible because they are just a few months out of Egypt. You might recall that there were several instances of God revealing Himself in pretty big ways while they were in Egyptian slavery (the plagues). There was a pretty big deal that happened as they left slavery (the parting of the Red Sea). And there have been several instances of God showing Himself and His power since then like the manna, the quail, the water from a rock. Also, God has just given them the 10 Commandments and with the mountain still smoking and shaking, the people are still not too sure. They still lacked faith.

It's so hard to wait on God sometimes, isn't it? I can imagine it was very hard for the Israelites to be waiting on God all this time. He gave them the 10 Commandments and they all agreed to do all that God commanded them to do but then He called Moses back up the mountain and Moses has been up there for forty days now and they haven't heard anything. What they didn't know was that God was revealing all kinds of other laws for them as well; laws that were for their benefit, to keep them safe as well as to help them know how to please God.

Now, maybe I'm reading too much into it but the way it is worded I picture a big, heavy guy with a New York accent coming to Aaron and saying, "Yo! Dis Moses guy what brought us outta Egypt. Nobody's seen him around the neighborhood in a while and we're pretty sure

he's dead, ya know? So, uh, why don't you goes and make us some of them there gods for us to worship, eh?" I picture him wearing a track suit and a heavy gold chain around his neck. But I may be reading too much into it. (If you're reading this, you read that in a New York accent, didn't ya? 😊)

Anyway, Aaron goes right along with them. Now, some people believe that maybe Aaron was trying to call their bluff by making them give up their gold to make this statue and that he thought they wouldn't actually do it if it cost them something. But we don't know that and it doesn't matter. There was a dozen different ways to handle this, all of them better than making an idol.

Aaron knew better. Or he should have. I guess they all should have really. But they had just come from Egypt and idol worship is all that they knew up until God brought them out of there so it looks like they were just falling back on what made sense to them. They were falling back to the natural instead of the supernatural.

But then it gets worse! Aaron tells them, *"These are your gods who brought you out of Egypt!"* Did Aaron just lose his ever-loving mind? "Gods" plural? *"...who brought you out of Egypt"*? This cow, this bull, this man-made golden calf critter made out of earrings just became a god? Now that takes some faith! It's just not faith in the right thing, obviously.

But wait! There's more! And it gets oh so much worse. Aaron then makes an altar for ol' Goldy the bovine god statue and then has the gall to announce, *"Tomorrow we are going to have a festival to Yahweh, the LORD."* He is calling this idol by the holy name of the one, true God. So, he has given it the credit due to God and is now calling it God and calling for a party to celebrate it.

What you have here is what is called **syncretism**. Syncretism is when you mix and match some from this religion with that religion and combine them. It's a religious buffet and it is sin. It's sort of like when you were a kid and you mixed all the different kinds of drinks together and drank it. Coke with Dr. Pepper with Sprite, etc. But that's just dumb. It's not going to kill you but it's not smart. Mixing Yahweh with idols...is deadly.

Do you think God is mad yet? But wait! There is still more and it just keeps getting worse. The hits just keep on coming! The next day, they celebrate and "worshipped" by offering sacrifices to Goldy. But then look again at the end of **verse 6**. *"Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry."* As if all of this wasn't enough, they indulged in revelry. This doesn't mean they played a rousing game of Monopoly. Does your version describe this any other way? The King James says, *"rose up to play."* The Modern Language Bible says they got up to *"make merry."* But the Living Bible actually describes it best when it says, *"they sat down to feast and drink at a wild party, followed by sexual immorality."*

Can you imagine what God was thinking when He saw this? He is on top of the mountain doing business with Moses, giving them the laws they needed to survive and prosper and He looks down the mountain and says, *“Excuse me, Moses. You are NOT going to believe this!”*

It's not like they didn't know what was expected of them, at least up to this point. And it's not like they were told a thousand years ago. **Just a few days before** this, they were given the 10 Commandments which included the words, *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 3“You shall have no other gods before me. 4“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.”* That's pretty plain. It should have been pretty easy to remember but they didn't and **that** was where the problem started. They didn't remember and a lack of remembrance leads to idolatry and idolatry leads to death.

I found this quote the other day but I don't know who said it. *“When we face difficulties, we sometimes forget God's past faithfulness. We see only the detours and the dangerous path. But look back and you will also see the joy of victory, the challenge of the climb, and the presence of your traveling Companion who has promised never to leave you nor forsake you.”*

Now, it would be easy to read through this passage in Exodus and think, *“Man, I'm glad I'm not as stupid and stiff-necked as those crazy Israelites! I'm glad I never did anything like that. Shoot, I can barely remember the last time I made a golden calf out of earrings.”* Right? We don't worship little man-made idols or bow down and call them Yahweh. That's ridiculous.

But what is worship? Worship is when we put God or ANYTHING ELSE first. When you come in here and praise and give God glory for all He has done in spite of what might be going on in your world, that is worship. Worship is giving God credit and glory for all He has done even when you can't see the end. Even when you don't feel like it and it's hard and life is confusing. But you remember how God has protected and provided in the past; that is worship.

But when we forget about what God has done in the past and we forget what God has promised to do in the future, we turn to idolatry. It happens all the time in our culture, in our lives and even in our church. We forget how God has healed some of us physically. We forget how God has saved marriages, healed relationships and provided financially. We forget that even in the difficult times, God has promised to always be there with us and to make everything come out for our good one way or another. We forget that and turn to idolatry.

We start to worship at the altar of self. Isn't that basically what the Israelites did? They couldn't see God and couldn't feel God and things got a little scary and so they decided they better just handle things themselves because they weren't sure that God would provide.

We worship at the altar of pride and ego. The bank account isn't where we think it ought to be so we decide we need to work 60-80 hours a week. We say we are doing it for our kids so they have a better life but what your kids need is you at home. The truth is we are doing it for ourselves, to increase our self-esteem by appearing more successful in the eyes of the world. As **King Solomon** put it, *"For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless"* ([Ecclesiastes 2:21-23](#)). Working too much is idolatry.

Working too little is idolatry as well. In **2 Thessalonians 3**, Paul says, *"For even while we were with you, we gave you this command: 'If anyone is **unwilling** to work, he shall not eat.'* 11 Yet we hear that some of you are leading undisciplined lives and accomplishing nothing but being busybodies." Nothing says, *"I worship myself"* like being able to work and not doing anything.

I have to admit I have worshiped at the altar of **materialism**. I was telling somebody just the other day I was going to use this as an illustration and here you go. I was given an old pontoon boat. It's ugly and slow and always needs something but I remember the first time I took it out. I gunned her up to top speed. Seventeen miles an hour wide open throttle, baby! And I was loving it! I felt free and fast! Until a small bird went flying past me right next to me and I realized maybe I wasn't going so fast. Then a bass boat scorched past me like I was sitting still and I remember thinking, *"I want that."*

If I could go a little faster, do a little more, be a little better, thinner, richer...then I will work on my relationship with God. That's called self-worship and you might as well cast your earrings into a cow and call it Jesus! There is nothing wrong with having stuff and God is not against us being happy. **John 10:10** says God wants us to have a full and abundant life. But He knows we will never be happy indulging our materialistic desires because it is Satan's trap to keep our focus on ourselves and not on God.

What that all boils down to is forgetting what God has done and what He promises to do and losing the faith that allows us to truly worship Him. Paul knew what true worship was and he said in **Philippians 4:11**, *"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances."* Paul remembered what God had done and he was overflowing with

God's promises for the future and that allowed him to have the faith he needed to live contentedly even when he was in prison. He was even able to truly worship in prison! You remember that incredible story in **Acts 16**.

Adoniram Judson, Jr. was a missionary to Burma (now Myanmar) in the 1800's and the story is told of him being in a nasty outdoor prison cell chained to a pole in the sweltering heat. A fellow prisoner looked at him and mockingly asked Judson, "*Dr. Judson, what about the prospect of the conversion of the heathen now?*", with a sneer on his face. His instant reply was, "***The prospects are just as bright as the promises of God.***" (The Presbyterian Advance)

Remembering what God has done and what He promises to do is the secret to having faith and without faith, we break God's law. We sin. We create false idols out of ourselves and out of others and out of things, titles, money, position or status.

Let me ask you this. What are you going to do to be reminded of what God has done in your life? What are you going to do to be reminded of God's promises for the future? Let me give you a real easy way to do that. Start by going to a church that talks about those things. Go to a church that encourages testimonies and gives thanks and where the people are open to sharing what God has done and what He promises to do.

Write it down when God answers prayer. Make yourself some kind of reminder of God's grace and mercy like these pebbles on the pulpit. We don't worship these pebbles. Not even close. But they are a reminder of what God has done in the past and that helps us remember what He promises to do in the future. It's called faith and it pleases God when we do that.

Now, if you are not a true believer and follower of Jesus this morning, forget everything I have said today. It doesn't apply to you. You can't please God if you have not given yourself completely to Him. In fact, **Romans 5:10** says, "*For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son **while we were still his enemies**, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son.*" If you do not have a life-changing relationship with God through His Son Jesus then you are actually an enemy of God. That's a scary place to be. And we have all been there.

Music

Romans 3:23 says we are all sinners. **Romans 6:23** says what we deserve for that sin is eternal death in Hell but **John 3:16** says that God loves you so much that He gave His only Son to die in your place and all you have to do is believe. It has nothing to do with how good or how bad you are or whether your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds.

Ask God for forgiveness today of all your many, horrific sins and failures and He will. Then acknowledge that Jesus is God and is the only way to Heaven and allow His Spirit to come into your life and change you. Do it today. We aren't guaranteed another breath. Do it right now as the music plays.