

*Exodus 32:7-14. But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "O LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? <sup>12</sup> Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. <sup>13</sup> Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.' " <sup>14</sup> Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.*

**Let your faithfulness and mercy be known, O Lord**

- 1. Seek the favor of a patient and merciful God.**
- 2. Have mercy on me, O Lord!**
- 3. Be an advocate for mercy**

How could they do such a thing? Even after all these years of hearing the account of the golden calf, this is still shocking. Out of all the foolish and sinful things they had done and all the things that the people of Israel would do to test the patience of God this is one that certainly stands out as an unforgettable, as blatant, as ugly and wrong.

It was the sin that seemed to be a tipping point or crossroads for God and his people too. The LORD had just delivered his people from Egypt. He had put them on their way to the promised land. He was engaged in the very process of marking them off as his chosen people by the giving of the law. But while God was giving Moses these holy commands on Mount Sinai, the people of Israel were down at the base of the mountain bowing down to a golden calf and proclaiming its praise. How could they do such a thing?!

The LORD had delivered them in such unforgettable fashion. He made his mighty hand known through the plagues, through the separating of the waters before them and then bringing the waters of the Red Sea crashing down upon their enemies. God had done so much for his people, and yet, in this act of repulsive rebellion, they gave God's praise to another. They gave the golden calf the credit for bringing them up out of Egypt. I don't like to use this word in sermons, and I even hesitate to use it in my personal life, but of all the *stupid* things that they would do, how could they even come up with such a blasphemous lie? That idol of gold had done nothing for them. God had done everything for them. The LORD had even supplied them with the gold that they had formed into this horrible idol. And yet, they gave God's praise to an image, an idol of their own creation. They had turned against God in such a disturbing and determined way. Like cattle who simply would not go

in the direction their master wanted they had turned their backs on God and headed their own way with stiff-necked stubbornness.

How infuriating?! How frustrating?! God, therefore, burned with anger as the people had defied him in such a blatant and blasphemous way. Notice how God talks about the people with Moses. These are *your* people, Moses. There is a noticeable disconnect here, isn't there? The people didn't just fail to recognize God and all that he had done for them, the people were consciously giving his praise to another. In so little time they had turned their backs on God, and if they refused to recognize the things that he had done for them why should God recognize them as his people anymore. How could they do such a thing?

How could they do such a thing? Have you found yourself asking that question more and more lately? In this culture where immorality abounds, godlessness is promoted, and hostility is all too often the native tongue, do you find yourself burning with anger in an 'us versus them' mentality more and more often. As you read the news, as you hear about the local happenings, as you hear about the foolish and sinful and harmful things that people are doing do you find yourself getting hot under the collar and bubbling over with frustration and even anger? How could they do such a thing and turn their backs on God? How could our nation, our state, our community forget about the Lord? How can we fill up the football stadiums and the bars so readily but leave the churches empty? How could our own members forget their confirmation vows and the promises they made and the importance of God's house? How could those people engage in such immoral behavior? How could they do such a thing?

Sin is repulsive and infuriating to God and it should be shocking and repulsive to those who belong to God too. And yet it should not only shock us and upset us with what is going on in the world, but we too must realize that *they are sinners and so am I*. **The finger rightly points at us as well.** *How could I do such wicked things and sin against God?*

We have been called to be children of God, but so often and so quickly we forget that God is looking, and others are looking as well, and we do stupid and sinful things that profane the name of the Lord. We forget who we are as his redeemed and chosen people. In moments of weakness, in foolishness of thought, in careless actions, and through seasons of senseless sin we break God's commands. We put ourselves first. We give in to our base instincts that are corrupt and sinful. We take our sinful desires, our creature comforts, and even our fears and we fashion these bad things into idols that we serve. And we even take the good things, the blessings that God has given to us, our wealth, our livelihood, even our hobbies, and we form them into the gods of our own making as we rebel against God and rob him of the glory that is rightfully his.

How could we do such a thing!?! We are all sinners. Just like Adam and Eve, just like the Israelites, we are sinners, but unlike these ancient people our worst moments, our worst sins are not recorded forever in the pages of Scripture! What if they were written down for all to read? What a dreadful thought! Thanks be to God we have a mediator who stands in the breach between sinners and a holy God and he calls on God to demonstrate

his faithful love, to keep his promises, and to act in justice and mercy. Jesus would come as that ultimate mediator. In Christ, the mercy and judgment of God would intersect at the cross as our sins of rebellion are dealt with by a God who is both perfectly just and perfectly merciful.

Moses serves as a type of picture of such a mediator as he would point ahead to the ultimate mediator who was to come. Notice how Moses goes into the breach between a faithful God and unfaithful people and he invokes the mercy and compassion of God as he points to the promises of our God. Moses speaks to God and pleads with him, let your mercy and faithfulness be known to the Egyptians and to the world. You delivered your people for a purpose. Keep your promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses spoke to God. He was an advocate for mercy on behalf of the people, and God would indeed relent according to his gracious promises. He would show mercy to his people, and God would indeed keep his promise to the patriarchs and would send the Deliverer.

Our LORD kept his promise and sent us Jesus, who like Moses goes to the Father in our defense and appeals to the justice and mercy of God. But better than Moses he fulfills the promises of God. He takes the punishment and wrath that our sins deserve upon himself and because God turned his back on Jesus as he suffered on the cross in our place, therefore God makes it known that he will not turn his back on us. God in his steadfast love remembers his promises to lead us to repentance, forgive, and to restore and guide us to heaven. In his great love, he sent his Son to pay for the rebellion of our sins with his life and to melt our stubborn stony hearts with his message of forgiveness and grace. With hearts so incredibly thankful for his mercy and undeserved love we sing with genuine emotion: *Jesus sinners does receive, even I have been forgiven*. Knowing that he has received me, Knowing that he has called me to be his own, that he blots out all my sins and remembers my wickedness no more, my heart and my life is made new as I too will consider how I may be an advocate for mercy so that others may know the unfailing love of God.

As Moses pleads for mercy for the people Moses would be one who was quite familiar with the goodness and mercy and steadfast love of God. God had given Moses a memorable second chance. After Moses killed an Egyptian and fled to Midian because of this sin God did not forget about Moses and sought him and found him. God was patient with Moses when Moses was reluctant to heed the Lord's call to lead the people out of Egypt. Yes, Moses was familiar with the mercy and the steadfast love of God. And so here Moses becomes this advocate for mercy. Even though these people of Israel would wrong Moses personally, Moses called upon God to display his mercy and uphold his promises to the people, who were truly God's very own.

Let us also be advocates for mercy. Knowing the mercy that God has shown to us, let us seek the favor of a merciful God on behalf of others, even those that have caused us harm. May it be our prayer that the faithfulness and mercy of God be made known in our world, in our communities, in our homes. It can be quite easy for us to become embroiled

in this “us versus them’ type of thinking. We react in a tabloid mentality or a gossip mill culture that revels in the sin of others, especially with the sin that is so obvious, so grievous, or so close to home. When we are embroiled in such a mentality, suddenly it becomes *those people* and if such individuals are no more than names that we talk about and then shake our heads in disgust.

Dear people of God, there are souls in our communities, in our towns, in our families, that are lost and wandering in the haze of sin and eternal death and they are souls that are precious to God. Pray for mercy. Seek out the favor of the Lord on behalf of the struggling, the straying, the lost, the lonely, the confused, the foolish, even those are stiff-necked and defiant. Pray to the LORD, our God who is abounding in love and faithfulness and patience. To say that he is a God of second chances is a start, but it also underestimates his abundant mercy and his stupendous grace. How many chances did he give to the people of Israel? How many chances does he give us in our unfaithfulness! Our God is merciful, abounding in steadfast love, incredible patience, and wonderful faithfulness.

Remember who God is. Call on him to be who he has shown himself to be, whom he has assured us that he is. At the giving of his commands for the second time, God would announce himself to be ***the Lord, the Lord, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*** Ask the Lord, *as you have reached out to me with your abounding mercy help me to reach out to loved ones, neighbors, friends, and co-workers who are lost and wandering in the dangers of sin. Have mercy, O Lord, on me, and on those struggling publicly and privately with sin. Have mercy, O Lord, on me, and on the lost, the wandering, the erring. Help me and the people of this congregation rejoice in the one soul that returns to you. Help us rejoice along with the angels in heaven over each sinner who repents. May this be our prayer. Let your faithfulness and mercy be known, O LORD.*

How could he do this? How could he forgive and restore his people after all they had done? Despite the disobedience, the defiance, the downright stupidity of his people our God is faithful, and he is merciful, and he forgives. Therefore, our Lord is praised by people all the world over for keeping his promises. In steadfast love, God sent his only Son to save. He delivered his people from Egypt. He patiently endured their grumbling, complaining, and stubborn defiance. He cared for, restored, and preserved his people so that his great promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be fulfilled. And this LORD, our God, so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son just as promised. May that mercy be known in our world, our nation, our communities, in our homes and in our lives.

Dear fellow redeemed, proclaim with me the name of the LORD our God. Let his faithfulness and mercy be known. Seek the favor of a patient God and let us be advocates for mercy as well. For we have been spared by the work of the mediator that is greater than Moses, we have been shown mercy and peace through Jesus Christ. How could he do this? How could he forgive even me? God is good and his mercy and his steadfast love endure forever. Amen.