

## **“Glory That Satisfies”**

Exodus 32-33

In November 1932, there was an Australian WWI veteran named Arthur Stace who had hit rock bottom in his life. He was an alcoholic and a chronic gambler. His addictions had left him homeless and drove him into a suicidal depression. After having failed to find anything that would alleviate the ache deep down his soul, he stumbled into a church one Sunday and heard a preacher talk about something called ‘eternity.’ The preacher told him, “You’re on your way somewhere my friend, and God made you to long for the place you’re headed.” Over and over again, the preacher used the word ‘eternity.’ It was a word that Arthur Stace couldn’t get out of his mind.

As he heard the gospel for the first time, he surrendered his heart to Christ and the God of heaven invaded his soul. Arthur Stace devoted the rest of his life to helping people find the God who found him. How did he do it?

Every day for more than 35 years, he would get up before sunrise, spend some time in personal worship and the Word, and then head out into the streets of Sydney with nothing more than a piece of chalk and write the word ‘eternity’ wherever he could. Over and over again, thousands upon thousands of times, Arthur Stace wrote that word ‘eternity’ in the same cursive script. When the rest of the city went to work or to school, they would see the word everywhere—on a sidewalk, on the back of a street sign, in front of a building. For years, the word ‘eternity’ mysteriously appeared all over town.

Until 1956, no one knew where the writing came from. But they finally found him, and no one demanded he stop. Instead, he was celebrated. He died in 1967 at

the age of 83, but he left a tremendous mark on his generation. The marker on his grave simply reads, “Arthur Malcom Stace—Mr. Eternity.”

Fast forward to the Olympic Games held in Sydney during the summer of 2000. At the opening ceremony hanging from the Sydney Harbor Bridge was this massive sign...

Last week, I began a series of messages on contentment and the search for happiness that is found in the heart of every human being. No matter who you are, no matter how old you are, I can guarantee that you have a desire on the inside of you to be happy. Where does it come from?

I made the argument from Scripture that we have been hardwired for happiness and contentment. It is evidence that we've been made in God's image. The creature's longing for happiness is evidence of the Creator's design. Its is evidence that we have been made for eternity.

**Ecclesiastes 3:11 — “He has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.”**

In other words, people are looking for the eternity that God made them to long for, but they can't find it on their own. No matter where a person looks, no matter what direction he or she turns, there is no lasting satisfaction to be found—at least not in the temporal things of this life. The reason is that we've been made for eternity.

That is why only the eternal glory of God can fulfill the eternal void in the human soul. There is a glory that satisfies, but it is not the passing glory that comes through pursuits independent from God— the essence of idolatry—something that Solomon learned.

We'll revisit Solomon later on, but for now, let's back up several centuries in Israel's history. Let's go all the way back to the base of Mt. Sinai. The first half of Exodus reveals how God rescued His people out of Egyptian slavery. Through the leadership of Moses, God brought them to Mt. Sinai where He revealed Himself and His law. The purpose? He wanted His people to have fellowship with Him, and He wanted to dwell in their midst.

In addition to giving them His law, God instructs Moses to make a sanctuary so that God can make His relational presence known to His people. He wants to dwell among His redeemed people. The last half of Exodus is devoted to the construction of a special structure known as the 'tabernacle.'

The point of these chapters is to explain how God dwelt with His people by means of the tabernacle and its special furniture, and it is a picture of the presence of God in Christ with His redeemed people. The tabernacle is all about the satisfying presence of God in and among His people. It is God working to restore what was forfeited by Adam's sin.

By the time we get to chapter 25, Moses has made a series of climbs to the top of Mt. Sinai. If we glance back to chapter 24, we read that God had summoned Moses and the elders of the people. Moses could come near, but the others were kept at a distance.

What happens in chapter 24 is a revelation of the way that God will meet with His people through the tabernacle later on. It will serve as a pattern for salvation and worship.

The end of chapter 24 says that Moses entered the cloud of God's presence at the top of the mountain and was there for 40 days and nights. God gives him the

design and the blueprints for the tabernacle. God's instructions to Moses are recorded in the next seven chapters.

By the time we come to chapter 32, the Lord has finished speaking with Moses and gives him the two stone tablets of testimony written with the finger of God. Moses' fellowship with God is interrupted. How so? The people had made an image of a golden calf when they saw that Moses had delayed to come down. It was Genesis 3 all over again!

The scene that unfolds at the base of Mt. Sinai is a tragic one, but it reveals just how prone we are to forsake the all-satisfying presence of God in exchange for idols.

In their impatience and unbelief, the people had exchanged a glory that satisfies for one that would not. Let me show you three things from the text:

### **1. Lusting for a GOLDEN image (32:1-24)**

*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!" 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."*

Moses had been on the mountain top with God, beholding the glory of God, and receiving the law of God. At the same time he's doing that, the people of Israel are growing impatient. What was their concern? Moses was taking too long. They didn't know what had become of him. They had been promised a land flowing with milk and honey, but for month and a half they had been camped out at the base of a remote mountain in Sinai desert.

And so they put the squeeze on Aaron:

*"Get up, make us gods who shall go before us!"*

In other words, they say, "God is taking too long! We need some immediate satisfaction now." And so Aaron has them take off their gold earrings and gold jewelry, he melts them down, and fashions the molten gold into an image of a calf.

In response, the people all gather around the golden calf and declare it to be the god that has brought them out of Egypt. Aaron even builds an altar before it and proclaims a feast to the Lord. He foolishly assumes that God will be ok with His people bowing down to a golden calf, yet doing it all in His name.

Think of the tragic irony here! While Moses is enjoying fellowship with God at the top of the mountain, receiving instructions that God intended to be a blessing to His people, all because God wants to dwell among His people, the people descend into the depths of idolatry.

In their impatience, they turn to a lesser object thinking that it can satisfy. It is the very thing that Adam and Eve had done way back in the beginning. And it is the very thing that we do when we exchange the glory of God for the false glory of an **idol**.

In our minds, the word 'idol' or 'idolatry' conjures up this picture of ancient people bowing down to stone statues. We think that idolatry is something that happened long ago in a far away place among primitive people unlike us in a more 'sophisticated' time.

What is an idol? Simply defined, it is anything that is more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give.

In this case, the people took their gold and melted it down into an image of a calf. That may sound strange to us, but it made sense to them at the time. They had been in Egypt for more than 400 years. Calf worship was ingrained in Egyptian society going all the way back to 3000 B.C. One of the Egyptian deities was a sacred bull called 'Apis' and was a fertility god connected with grain and herds. The image of a calf was closely related to economic success.

Remember that the Israelites had been told that God was leading them into a land flowing with milk and honey. It was a picture of stability, success, and satisfaction. But for the past month and a half, they had been camped out at the bottom of a mountain in the middle of nowhere, and Moses was nowhere to be found.

In their impatience, they turn back to Egypt in their hearts and become fixated on a golden god that they could see.

We've been made for the glory of God, but sin leads us to glory in far lesser things. We become fixated upon those things that we think will satisfy. We look away from God and begin to lust after images. The 'golden calf' still shows up, just in a different form. Sometimes, it shows up:

- in the form of sexual idolatry
- in the form of relational idolatry
- in the form of material idolatry

Why does a person chase an idol in the first place? It is because they think that the idol will somehow provide them with the happiness and satisfaction that they lack. And so we echo, “God takes too long. We need satisfaction now!”

Impatience is often the cause for impulsive actions that are sinful and selfish. I want to be happy! No matter if it means walking out on my spouse of my youth. No matter if it means cheating to climb my way to the top. No matter if it means reducing women to objects to gratify my lust. No matter if it means abandoning the church in pursuit of some success. We’re still very much drawn to ‘golden’ images.

- image of a golden relationship
- image of a golden career
- image of a golden lifestyle

You want to know what’s sad about all of this? The people were not far from a glory that truly satisfies. All they had to do was look up. They were not far from true rest. Yet they might as well have been a million miles away, all because of their unbelief and lack of faith.

Look at what happens in verse 7:

*“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. 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 and sacrificed to it and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'"*

Idolatry never escapes God's all-seeing, all-knowing gaze. While some had no problem totally abandoning the Lord, some wanted to party around the golden calf while feasting in the name of the Lord. But it was wholesale idolatry. The golden calf had replaced the Lord God in their hearts.

Moses begins to plead with God on behalf of the people. On his way down the mountain, he hears what sounded like the noise of war in the camp. Yet it wasn't a shout of victory, nor was it the cry of defeat. It was the sound of singing and celebration and revelry.

He sees the people dancing before the image, and his anger burns hot. He throws the stone tablets of God's law down on the ground, a fitting picture of their sin. He burns up the golden calf, grinds it to powder, and scatters it on the drinking water and makes the people drink it.

Listen to this—they needed to taste the **bitter** effects of idolatry. What they thought would satisfy their thirst, what they thought would better their lives only ended up making them bitter. What if 'better' is really bitter? Would it really change your mind about what is truly most important?

Moses then asks for an explanation from Aaron, who says to him in verse 23:

*"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. 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 this calf."*

A pathetic response to be sure, but what happens next shows just how serious idolatry is to God. Moses has the sons of Levi kill with the sword 3,000 people and God sends a plague upon the people. It is a tragic reminder of how the wages of sin is always death. Death, not life!

## **2. Looking to a GOD who saves (32:30-33:6)**

*30 The next day Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” 31 So Moses returned to the Lord and said, “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. 32 But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.” 33 But the Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. 34 But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.” 35 Then the Lord sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made.*

The people had sinned against God, and their sin needed to be atoned for. They had been made to taste the bitter and nauseating reality of their idolatry. It illustrates how we end up with the bitter aftertaste and painful consequences of turning to something other than God to satisfy the desire of our heart. Their heart had been given over to an idol, and only God could rescue them from such depths.

Now it may not come in the grotesque form of a golden calf, but we still find substitutes for God much in the same way that these Israelites did.

**Ezekiel 14:3—“These men have set up their idols in their hearts.”**

God is saying in that verse that the human heart takes good things like a successful career, or romantic love, or material possessions, or even family, and

turns them into ultimate things. In our hearts, we deify them and make them the center of our lives because we think they can provide us with significance and security, happiness and satisfaction, only if we but attain them.

They become our functional saviors that we turn to in order to escape the misery of our lives. Whether we realize it or not, we look to them to provide us with salvation.

**Timothy Keller** — *“We think that idols are bad things, but that is almost never the case. The greater the good, the more likely we are to expect that it can satisfy our deepest needs and hopes.”*

Keller says that your idol is something that is so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living. It has such a controlling position in your heart that you can spend most of your passion and energy, your emotional and financial resources, on it without a second thought. It can be family and children, or career and making money, or achievement and social status, or your perception in the eyes of others. It can be a romantic relationship, approval from other people, your skill or competency in something, comfortable circumstances, your beauty or your brains, your politics, your morality, or even success in Christian ministry.

An idol is whatever you look at and say, deep down in your heart, “If I have that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure.”

Idols rob us of the very salvation that we think they will provide. Rather than quenching our thirst, they only make us more thirsty. (illus. of saltwater)

God wants to ‘tabernacle’ among His people, but they are bent on going their own way because of sin. How could a holy and transcendent God dwell among a people who were so inherently sinful?

Only if their sin was **atoned** for. (Covered)

This is something that Moses recognized. He even offers himself up as a substitute on the people’s behalf. But God says that the one who has sinned against Me, I will blot out of My book. This tension is only solved in the gospel.

**Austin Gentry** — *“All false gods will bleed you dry, but only Jesus bled for you.”*

As the people of God, we should be desperate for the presence of God. We should live with this constant awareness. Jesus died to save me from judgment, and only He can satisfy my soul.

Notice what the Lord says to Moses in verse 1:

*1 The Lord said to Moses, “Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your offspring I will give it.’ 2 I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 3 Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.” 4 When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. 5 For the Lord had said to Moses, “Say to the people of Israel, ‘You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do with you.’” 6 Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.”*

There can be no satisfaction apart from salvation, no promise without God’s presence. God makes His people aware of the fact that they desperately need

Him. He says, “Go ahead, go on up to the land that I’ve promised, the land flowing with milk and honey. But know that I won’t go up with you.” He says it twice—verse 3, verse 5.

It is a painful reminder of the consequences of idolatry. As God, only He can save and only He can satisfy.

Notice in verse 5 that God instructs the people to take off all of their ‘ornaments.’ The very things that they had used to make the golden calf. God says, “Give it to me.” And verse 6 says the people stripped themselves of all their ornaments from Mount Horeb onward. Earlier, they had forfeited the presence of God for their ornaments. Now, they are forfeiting their ornaments for the presence of God.

They realize just how foolish they had been to so quickly turn to a golden image in their impatience, foolishly thinking that it could do for them what only God Himself could do.

Listen—the challenge that we face today is an unconscious worship of idols. They may not be as obvious as a golden calf, but they are no less rivals to the glory of God in our hearts. Part of following Christ is learning to identify and tear them down. Enjoy creation, but worship the Creator!

### **3. Longing for a GLORY that satisfies (33:7-23)**

The scene shifts to Moses and the Lord in verse 7. God spoke with Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend. Moses intercedes once more for the people:

*12 Moses said to the Lord, “See, you say to me, ‘Bring up this people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and*

*you have also found favor in my sight.’ 13 Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.” 14 And he said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” 15 And he said to him, “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. 16 For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?”*

*17 And the Lord said to Moses, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” 18 Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” 19 And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. 20 But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” 21 And the Lord said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, 22 and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”*

The God who saved them from Egypt wanted to be the God who sustained them in the wilderness, as well as the God who would satisfy them in the Promised Land. And so He reassures Moses in verse 14:

*“My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”*

Moses says, “Show me Your glory!” Only the glory of God truly satisfies the longings of our heart. Nothing else will do. We always turn to idols when we lose sight of God.

The ultimate purpose of salvation is the glory of God. God redeems people for the purpose of worship. God delivers people for His own glory. As a believer,

you have been saved for the purpose of showcasing the glory of God and living for the glory of God. It is the only glory that satisfies.

God would go with His people and tabernacle among them. The tabernacle would be His sanctuary, the place where His presence dwelt among His people. Scripture reveals that God has always desired to dwell among those He created in His image. This was the purpose for man's creation way back in the beginning of Genesis. The garden of Eden was a sanctuary for the presence of God where God lived with humanity. The mission of God throughout redemptive history is about salvation of fallen humanity so that we can live in His presence once again.

Think about how humanity is marked by a longing for what I would call 'transcendence,' and it shows up in our pursuit of things outside ourselves to fulfill something inside us.

**J.R.R. Tolkien** - *"We all long for Eden, and we are constantly glimpsing it. Our whole nature at its best and least corrupted, its gentlest and most humane, is still soaked with a sense of exile."*

Lost and alienated from the life of God, man gropes around in the darkness for something that he cannot find on his own. That's why he turns to idols. That is why he needs God to rescue him and restore him to his original purpose.

**Augustine** - *"Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."*

Jesus said:

**Matthew 11:28**—**"Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."**

*Come, Thou Fount of every blessing  
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace*

*Streams of mercy, never ceasing  
Call for songs of loudest praise  
Teach me some melodious sonnet  
Sung by flaming tongues above  
Praise the mount, I'm fixed upon it  
Mount of Thy redeeming love*

*Here I raise my Ebenezer  
Here there by Thy great help I've come  
And I hope, by Thy good pleasure  
Safely to arrive at home  
Jesus sought me when a stranger  
Wandering from the fold of God  
He, to rescue me from danger  
Interposed His precious blood  
Oh, to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I'm constrained to be  
Let that goodness like a fetter  
Bind my wandering heart to Thee  
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it  
Prone to leave the God I love  
Here's my heart, oh, take and seal it  
Seal it for Thy courts above*