

St Martins C3 – February 9, 2025

How to Make a Golden Calf - Encounter

Sermon Notes:

Today, we are going to look at a recipe for stepping away from God and totally abandoning Him. If you want to make your own golden calf, here are the ingredients.

Last week, we saw how Israel was invited to move closer to God. They gradually moved from fear to faith, from caution to connection.

Read Exodus 32:1-25

What a crazy story of how Israel moved from caution to connection to complacency. The presence of God was so close to them, yet they tried to replace Him. If we are not careful, this is something that might happen to us.

So, here is our recipe for how to make a golden calf. Take these ingredients and follow this formula.

1- Neglect God's Presence (Complacency)

They said, "Make us some gods, we don't know if God is really there." Even though God was right there.

It is easy to move from a connection with God to complacency. We are still aware he is there, but we don't prioritize Him, and we begin to drift away.

2- Forget God's character (Cynical)

The people of Israel thought the calf was God. They didn't know who God was. When we move to complacency it is always because we lose sight of who God is. His might, glory, holiness, goodness & love.

One of our major problems is that we have very big "forgetteries". We forget so easy the things God has done. We need to remember.

3- Find a God replacement (comparison)

The people of Israel looked to the calf to be their God. They saw all the things that God gave them, and they placed that onto the calf. They made sacrifices to it and committed themselves to it.

When things are dry with God, it is easy to ask the question: Where else can I go to get the same things I got from God at first?

Complacency is like a door that gets caught by the wind. It starts slowly but then takes over very quickly. We have opened the door to all kinds of God replacements. We close the door a little bit to God. Before we know it slams! We have shut the door completely to God. Before we know it, slam! Our life is filled with the things we do not want it to be.

If you want a golden calf, do these things. If you do not, then commit to doing the opposite. One way we can do the opposite is to prioritize coming to church. Spend some time thinking about your church commitment this year.

Questions for Connect Groups:

Key Point

Moving from connection to complacency is easy, we need to immerse ourselves in God to prevent it from happening.

Questions

What stood out to you from this week's message?

What does this message tell you about God and humans?

What do you think of the behaviour of Israel in Exodus 32?

Where have you seen someone follow a similar pattern?

Which of the three ingredients to complacency are you most susceptible to: comfort, cynicism or comparison?

Comfort: Why is it so easy to neglect God's presence?

Cynicism: Discuss whether your heart is hard or soft to God?

Comparison: What other thing would you most easily turn into a golden calf (God replacement)?

What can you do to prevent these things in your life?

How can you immerse yourself in the things of God?

Why is church attendance important as Christians?

What does regular church attendance look like for you and your family? How can we support you in that?

Monday Devotion: God with Adam and Eve

Read Genesis 3

As we read about the first sin of people, we see its devastating consequences. There is a breakdown in the relationship between the man and the woman. The distance between mankind and creation. There is also the death that comes and their inability to eat from the tree of life.

However, the greatest of all of the losses from the fall was the close and personal relationship with God. We read that in the cool of the evening, God is heard walking in the garden. This is the first time God walking in the garden is mentioned. However, they are so familiar with his footsteps that they know it is God.

There is a hint here at a close relationship without any barriers before the fall. That close relationship is what humanity was created to enjoy.

It is a shame that we live in times where their sin, and (let's be honest here) our sin keeps us from having a close relationship with God. Sin creates a distance between us and God.

That is why Jesus came. His coming set in motion the great reversal. We have life through believing in His name. We bring the Kingdom, restoring our relationship to the world and to each other. But most importantly, through Him, we have a restored relationship with God.

Today, let us go through the open door that Jesus has created and walk towards God rather than hide from Him.

Tuesday Devotion: God and Abraham

Read Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-16; James 4:7-8

The next encounter we will explore is the calling of Abraham. Prior to this God calls Noah to a job, here God calls Abraham to be the father of a people who will be the carriers of a blessing.

There is an interesting extra-biblical story about the way God chose Abraham. The Book of Jubilees (a Jewish text from the 2nd century BC) says that Abraham began to question idol worship from a young age and reasoned that the stars, moon, and sun were not divine. He prayed for the Creator to reveal Himself, and God answered, leading him away from idolatry. (Jubilees 11:16–12:27; see some alignment with Joshua 24:2).

We see in the story of Abraham that he is a seeker of God, and this comes from an attitude of faith.

We, too, need to come to God with a seeker's heart filled with faith. It is a pre-requisite to meeting with God and receiving from Him.

When you have a quiet time, do you believe that God will meet with you?

We need to have hearts that long for Him, souls that look for Him and ask for Him to reveal Himself to us. As we do this, we step forward in faith to do all that God asks of us. Come to Him in faith today and take joy from the time you are able to spend in His presence.

Wednesday Devotion: Jacob Wrestles with God

Read Genesis 28:10-22; 32:22-32

There is a theory that there exists on earth locations that at specific times are “thin places”. These are places where the space between Heaven and Earth is greatly diminished. Where the presence of God is more readily felt, and He is more keenly experienced.

One example would be Mount Sinai during the giving of the Ten Commandments. Another would be the transfiguration of Jesus.

Whether that theory is true or not, it is very clear that God breaks through into Jacob’s life in these moments in powerful ways. His vision of the ladder between Heaven and Earth is remarkable, not only for the power of the vision at a time when He most needed it but also because of the repeat of the promise for Him to possess the land He was running away from.

The second encounter changed Jacob’s very identity and transformed Him into Israel.

At times of great change or hinge points in our lives, we must create thin places to allow God to speak what He needs to and to continually reform our identity. This is not through finding the magical prayer formula or mystical location but through a heart surrendered to God and His way. Even if it does take a bit of wrestling before we get there.

Thursday Devotion: God and Joseph

Read Genesis 39:2-3; 21-23;

Joseph is one of the great characters of faithfulness in Scripture. He was cast out by his brothers, and he was tempted and imprisoned though he did not sin.

It is striking that at his lowest moments, we read God was with Joseph. He wasn't just with Joseph when everything was going well, and He was a world conqueror, but when He was a slave and a prisoner.

It is a funny thing in life that often the moments of greatest need are the moments of our greatest need for God. When life is difficult, we need to dig into the greatest resource we have, our relationship with God.

As we get desperate for God, we too can experience His sustaining grace to take us through the hardest of times.

The second side of this story is remaining aware of God when we experience comfort and success. When life is going well, we find it easy to neglect our time with God.

What if we were to have the same desperation for God when things are going well as when we are suffering? We could see great things happen in our life if we would continue to seek God in the good times and in the bad.

Bring whatever you are going through to God today, whether it is good or bad and ask Him to continually let you know He is with you.

Friday Devotion: God and Isaiah

Read Isaiah 6:1-13

We all need an encounter with God like this. Where we feel completely undone. We realise we cannot stand in His presence because of how great He is and how sinful we are.

If you have that experience, then it completely changes you. It certainly does for Isaiah. Isaiah uses a name for God that barely anyone else uses. He calls God “The Holy One”. He uses it nearly thirty times in his prophetic messages that follow.

Imagine going home after this vision and trying to watch the latest Netflix movie. Or a reality TV show where people try to beat down other messed-up people! You wouldn't be able to stand it, you've just experienced the holiness of God. This is so unworthy. Imagine your prayer time! If we see God in the way He sees God, I think it would make a difference to us, too!

If we come too close without respect, we will be consumed. We do not, on our own merits, have the opportunity to stand in His presence. We need to treat God with more respect than we currently do. He is so holy we are doomed.

When Heaven comes to earth, it either consumes or cleanses. And the fire of God, to Isaiah's great surprise, cleanses Him rather than consumes him. Jesus does the same for us.

Isaiah was called by God to bring messages of warning and destruction. He was to be someone whose message the people rejected. Ultimately, though, he is one of the greatest voices of hope in the Bible. It started with an encounter. Let's ask God to encounter us in big and small ways this week.