

"Take and Drink" -- Exodus 32:15-20

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Dear brethren,

Moses, the leader of the children of God, had been gone for so long - a period of time that was not right at forty days and forty nights. He had been called by the Lord God to come to the holy place ... to Mt. Sinai. Joshua accompanied him to a certain point, but it was Moses who went up the mountain. There Moses entered the cloud and the Glory of the Lord shone around him. There it was that this son of Amram and Jocebed was tested by the Lord. There it was, on the cloud-covered mountain that Moses received the two tablets of the Testimony - the Testimony etched in stone tablets by the finger of God.

Meanwhile, back at camp, the children of God were getting restless. They gathered together and confronted Aaron, their spiritual leader while Moses was away. *Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for 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 (Exodus 32:1)*. The people demanded an up-to-date god and a contemporary worship service in which they could sing and play, eat and drink. So Aaron, a weak leader who was unable, due to his unwillingness, who was unable to resist the ungodly demands of the people. Thus, he departed from his charge and gave them what they wanted. He and the congregation fashioned a golden calf which probably consisted of a carved wooden core with gold plating. The golden calf might very well have been a copy of the Egyptian bull-god, Apis.

The Lord has said in the First Commandment, *I Am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no others gods before Me (Exodus 20:2-3)*. With Moses gone and having seen Aaron waver in his leadership, the congregation suddenly declared what it believed. The golden calf, fashioned and molded by Aaron, became their god and the congregation confessed, *This is your god; O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt (Exodus 32:4)*. Aaron became frightened and, in an attempt to keep the people from completely abandoning the Lord God, made a proclamation that the next day would be a feast to the Lord.

Dear brethren, this truly is a frightening, awful, terrible situation. It should strike fear into our hearts just reading this account. What was going to happen to the congregation when the great Jehovah God met the idol golden calf? What would take place to the individual people when the Lord God Almighty descended upon the camp where Apis the Egyptian idol was openly confessed as god? To find out, please listen to the sermon text, Exodus 32:15-20, doing so under the theme:

... Take and Drink

And Moses turned, and went down from the mountain with the two tables of the Testimony in his hands, tables that were written on both sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables. When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp." But he said, "It is not the sound of shouting for victory, or the sound of

the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing that I hear." And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tables out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it upon the water, and made the people of Israel drink it.

Thus far the Word of the Lord our God.

Moses, with the two stone tables of the Testimony in hand, descended from Mt. Sinai. Each stone contained the Ten Commandments and was the Covenant of the Law that the Lord God had written with His finger for His people. Along the way Moses meets Joshua and together they continue the descent. Suddenly Joshua, the son of Nun, hears the noise as the people are shouting in their new syncretistic, unionistic worship services. Evidently thinking the camp must be under attack, there is a discussion, *There is a noise of war in the camp.* One replies "Listen, *it is not the sound of shouting for victory, or the sound of the cry of defeat, but it is the sound of singing that I hear.*"

Now, dear brethren, it is obvious from this text as well as other places in the Bible that singing, in itself, is not sinful. After being miraculously delivered at the parting of the Red Sea, *Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and spoke, saying: "I will sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him."*

Whether the singing of a particular song or hymn is sinful or not is based upon several conditions. First, is it directed to the Lord God, or is it directed to some other god? For truly, there is no other god than the Lord. Second, does the singing confess the Lord God, or does it acknowledge someone or something else as the highest good? Third, does it contain the truth or does it have false teaching? Fourth, does it focus on the Lord and what He has done, or is it a "me" song? For example, here at Our Redeemer we do not sing "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" because it contains false doctrine and is very "I" centered. Fifth, are the hymns being sung by faithful people of God or by people who are not Christians? Indeed, we are told in the Bible that *without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).*

While Moses could hear the singing, he couldn't make out the words or the specific details concerning the worship going on. He knew about the golden calf and the idolatrous worship for the Lord told him about it earlier. So, he continues the walk down the mountain intent on carrying out his work and *as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tables out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.*

Now it should be clear at this point that Moses was not engaged in a personal temper tantrum causing him to throw down what he was carrying and stamp his feet. Indeed, not. Rather, the Bible tells us that *threw the tables out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain*, thus bearing witness against the congregation that they had broken the Covenant that the Lord God had given them. They had been given the Law and they had broken it before they had traveled an inch from the base of Mt. Sinai. The Law always accuses the Old Adam. As a result Moses preached the Law to them with righteous anger that burned hot and he did so by breaking the stone tablets at the *foot of the mountain.*

He didn't stop at that point. In fact, Moses does something that seems just a bit strange. He turns his attention to the idol that Aaron and the congregation had formed - to the golden calf. With the stone fragments at the foot of the mountain as well as at the feet of the people, Moses *took the calf which they had made, and burnt it with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it upon the water, and made the people of Israel drink it.*

He burnt the golden calf. Any wooden parts of it were reduced to ashes. The gold probably melted and mixed with dirt and ashes. Moses informs us, *Then I crushed it and ground it very small, until it was as fine as dust (Deuteronomy 9:21).* Moses took the powder and scattered it on the water that came down from Mt. Sinai. Then, probably to the amazement of everyone, he made these stiff-necked, these bull-necked people drink it. "Take and drink!"

The children of Israel had not simply been naughty and needed an object lesson so they would remember. I do not think that he made them drink it for the same reason my grandma washed my mouth out with soap on at least one occasion. There was no cleansing intended when he told them to "take and drink." Moses was certainly not trying to make them feel ashamed of themselves. It went far beyond mere shame. Humiliation was not the depth of what was intended. Rather, it was a drinking with judgment, announcing both the reality of the sin and the consequences that accompany the breaking of the Law.

"Take and drink. Bend the knee to this brook and gulp down the sifted remains of this precious god your hands have fashioned. Bow the neck to this stream and swallow your broken, crushed idol. Drink it to the dregs and carry your transgression in the pit of your stomach and the knowledge of it in your mind and the dread of it in your souls. Your god will consume you from within. Bear the burden of your sin alone and do so without Me for *you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons (1 Corinthians 10:21).*"

Now I must confess that I found it difficult to glean much Gospel from this Law-laden sermon text. However, the fact that the Lord God did not instantly vent His righteous and holy wrath upon this fallen world and direct all the people at the foot of Mt. Sinai to go to hell, is an indication of His mercy and long-suffering. Why didn't He do that? The Bible tells us that *in His Divine forbearance He had passed over former sins (Romans 3:25).* This morning, it is my privilege to tell you why He did not render immediate judgment on the sins of the Old Testament people then and on your and my sins now. Truly, you children of God, this is Good News.

Concerning the children of God at Mt. Sinai, He did not render an immediate condemnation upon all of them because He was preserving a people from whom the Messiah would come. Judgment was rendered on many of them and they were killed, but not all of them. Even *if we are faithless, He remains faithful -- for He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13).* Therefore, the people of God who longed for His appearing have, throughout the centuries, waited for the promised Savior. They waited in certain hope for the appearance of the Ancient of Days. A thousand years and more pass. Immanuel is coming. The advent of *God with us* is near.

Look! There in the garden called Gethsemane is this God-Man come among us. What has He come to do. In that garden He beholds the cup set before Him. It is filled with the dregs of sins whose payment has come due -- with the transgressions of those who have neglected the One true God and who have fashioned gods for themselves -- the gods of power, pride, money, education, food and self -- and who have bowed down to these idols. The cup before Him is filled with payment owed and

caused by the utterances of foul mouths that curse God, use His Name to damn others, and all the while fail to call upon Him in any trouble. The cup before this Jesus is filled with the Divine penalty for those who go through the motions of the Divine Service and render only lip service in response. There are the wages of your sins and mine ... of Lutherans who are hearers of the Word of God, but who are not doers ... of Lutherans who presume that because God will even forgive those sins, that they still don't need to be doers of the Word. Indeed, the cup before Jesus contains the price for those people who presume upon God's grace and who will, one day, be in hell because of such unbelief.

Look at this Jesus as He beholds the cup of suffering filled to the brim with the sediment of all the sins of all people. Do you not see God Incarnate agonizing over this cup? Do you not behold Jesus sweating blood and being sorrowful even to the point of death? Listen. God the Son is praying to God the Father. Jesus petitions, *"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt"* (Matthew 26:39). The silence from the Father is deafening. Do you not hear what the Father tells the Son in the still, silent Garden of Gethsemane? He says to Him, "Take and Drink."

The cup of wrath exacts its payment, being absorbed in the very Body of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Father abandons the Son as the penalty due to the broken tablets of the Law is paid. The forces of the Evil One assault this Lamb led to the slaughter. And when the very Blood of Jesus had been shed for the remission of sins, He declares it sufficient, *It is finished*. Jesus has died in our place. The day is dark and the night is quiet.

Dear brethren, it is Sunday morning and the tomb is empty. It could not hold Him for He is God. It could not hold Him for Satan has been defeated and death has been conquered. By the grace of God through faith in Christ's sin-atonement Death and triumphant Resurrection, we are able to come into the Presence of the Living God. What does He say to us as we stand at the foot of the mountain and gaze into this holy house? Oh yes, He still says, *"You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons"* (1 Corinthians 10:21) He also says, "Your sins are forgiven. If this is what you believe, then enter my gates with thanksgiving and My courts with praise." What does He say to you children who have been baptized in the Name of the Holy Trinity? *"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine"* (Isaiah 43:1)." What does He say to you who are not members of the congregation but may be visiting today? He invites with the invitation carrying with it the power to make it happen, *"Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28).

What does He say to those who have confirmed the faith and are of one mind in doctrine -- to those who are able to examine themselves -- to those who are able to discern not only the Body of Jesus with the bread on the altar but also the Blood of Jesus in the cup -- to those who believe in the words, *"given and shed for you for the remission of sins."* To such as these, the Lord extends the cup of blessing and says ...

..."Take and Drink." Amen.