

THE DANGER IN THE DELAY

The Pressure to Compromise While Awaiting the Lord's Return

Exodus 32

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When the Lord was with His disciples in the Upper Room on the night before His death, He gave them this wonderful promise: “*In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am there you will be also*” (John 14:2-3). That promise—that He would personally return for His own has been the blessed hope and joyful expectation of believers everywhere from the time that He ascended to the Father unto the present day. Despite the fact that this truth has been either forgotten or neglected by many Christians throughout the centuries, it still remains a purifying hope for all those who love His appearing. It points to a joyous reunion and brightens the countenance of everyone who can truly say, “He loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). But while we wait for His return, there is work to do and dangers to avoid. What those dangers are is clearly pictured for us in the episode of Israel and the golden calf in Exodus 32.

During their wilderness sojourn, Israel had grown impatient waiting for the return of their leader Moses from Mt. Sinai where he had gone to receive instructions concerning the Tabernacle. He had been there for an extended time and was to come back at a time appointed by God. But while Israel waited for him, they had forgotten their high calling, lost their sense of purpose and became occupied with other things. In their compromised condition, they approached Aaron who capitulated to their demands for an alternative and sensual form of worship. Instead of correcting them, he accommodated their weakened spiritual state and fashioned a molten calf from their earrings and subsequently proclaimed an unauthorized feast to the Lord. The result was confusion and devastating judgment from the hand of the Lord. (v. 35; 1 Cor. 10:7)

This disaster in the desert is filled with timely lessons for the people of God. Just as Moses, Israel's divinely-appointed leader and deliverer went up to God, so too the Lord Jesus our divinely-appointed Leader and Deliverer ascended to Heaven subsequent to His resurrection, with a promise to return at a time appointed by the Father (Acts 1:7). But until He returns, there are dangers that need to be guarded against by the Lord's people. One of those dangers is *pressure* from God's people to steer the spiritual life of the assembly. God had specifically appointed Moses and Aaron, men of His own choosing to lead the congregation. But now that leadership was being challenged. The people knew that Aaron was in the minority and utilized the unsettled state of affairs to their advantage by gathering together and making petulant demands of him. As the pressure mounted, Aaron caved in to their request. Leaders in every generation continually need to guard against pressure from God's people to deviate from the biblical pattern of faith and worship in order to replace it with worldly alternatives during the time that our Lord's return is delayed. Equally, God's people as a whole need to be reminded that His return is indeed imminent and that they should not grow weary in well-doing or waiting, and thus lose sight of the blessed hope and the sense of their pilgrim calling.

Another danger to avoid is the specter of *popular opinion*. Certainly Aaron could have dealt with the congregation more judiciously. No doubt feeling isolated and alone, Aaron should have nevertheless remained resolute in his convictions. But the demands of the people proved too much. Who was he to go against so many? This burgeoning movement at the base of Mt. Sinai was gathering momentum and perhaps he thought it best to give the people what they wanted to appease the situation. Besides,

maybe he was having second thoughts about Moses' return or even what he should be doing during the interim. But he should have realized that these demands were coming from people who had not been long out of the land of Egypt. Obviously, they still possessed some of the vestiges of their previous life in Egypt and needed to be instructed in the ways of God. Is it any surprise then that many of God's people in our day, also redeemed are likewise recent emigrates from "Egypt" and similarly need to be instructed in the ways of God since they too have the residue of that land in their lives? They may be unified and fully persuaded in their thinking that a certain course of action is legitimate, but one principle in Scripture is very clear – the majority is usually wrong. Our society is continually blitzed with sensual messages and music from a variety of sources--ungodly influences that can infiltrate the lives of many of the Lord's people, adversely affecting their attitudes and actions. If believers have not learned the discipline of keeping themselves unspotted from the world (James 1:27), they can likewise lose their spiritual focus and forget that they are passing through a spiritual wasteland en route to their inheritance reserved for them in heaven (1 Peter 1:4; 2:11). As a result, they may feel the need to look for alternative forms of worship to satisfy carnal desires, feeding on that which is contrary to the life of faith—things God never meant to be: programs that simply entertain; lavish, expensive activities that ring hollow; events that hardly satisfy the soul since they point away from the Person of Christ. No matter how popular an idea may be, if it does not stack up against the Word of God, it will also bring confusion and ultimately discipline from the Lord. How foolish to think that this type of worship, the product of their own devising can satisfy the heart as only God can! But this is what happens when God's people like Peter look downward, rather than to the Lord (Matt. 14. There is danger in the delay!

Finally, a third danger to avoid is unbiblical *proclamation*. Perhaps to justify his own hypocrisy, Aaron "hallowed" the event by declaring it as a feast to the Lord, as though God had ordained or would excuse this sordid affair at Sinai. Unfortunately, some of God's people do the same thing today, erroneously declaring the approval of God on something that has no biblical warrant. The declaration no doubt instigated further sin among the congregation. Were it not for the passionate intercession of Moses who in this instance is portrays Christ our Advocate and Great High Priest (Heb. 2:14), judgment most certainly could have been even worse (vv. 11-14).

The events of this portion are a clarion call, especially to our own generation. While the Lord tarries, there is a danger that God's people will take the low road spiritually. The process is this: delay followed by demands, and demands followed by departure and departure by unbiblical declaration and unbiblical declaration by disaster and ultimately, discipline from the hand of God. Let us be then be faithful and true to the Lord whom we love, whose return we should look for daily, lest we bring dishonor to the testimony of Christ.