

What is Your Golden Calf?

Week after week it seems we hear about the fickleness of the Israelites – the chosen nation.

What does it mean to be the chosen nation?

Is Israel chosen to represent God on earth?

Does being the chosen race give you the right to crush and destroy the Palestinian people - year by year squeeze them into the Gaza strip and expect them to be compliant?

What does it mean to be chosen by God?

You and I are chosen by God – to be his ambassadors and fellow servants – serving our community.

An ambassador gets their instructions from the country they represent.

They are the closest people to the king, the president, the prime minister – they are representing.

They meet regularly.

- The Israelites of today are called to represent God.
- We are called to represent God.

Can you represent God at the footy? (More on that in a minute)

Moses went to meet God – for instruction.

He was to serve and lead the Israelites on their journey to the promise land.

This instruction took a while – what happened up there? We don't know – except it took a while.

It says: *When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."*

What did they think?

- Has God killed Moses?
- Has God taken Moses up to be with him for ever?

How fickle.

Moses is "delayed" - let's build a golden calf.

It's so pathetic.

The God's of Baal and the Egyptians were big strong Bulls – *"Many strong bulls of Bashan surround me"* – Jesus says from the cross.

These strong bulls of the Baal even put fear into Jesus – they didn't make Jesus change his resolve – they simply terrified him.

So, they make a calf – an insult to idolism, and an insult to God – and so quick – so fickle.

A calf! Probably a jersey calf – so they would use less gold.

What is the real idol here – the calf or is it simply impatience?

You make a 9.00 o'clock appointment to see the doctor – you're the first patient for the day – you get there, and you're told you have to wait...

You ring up your phone provider, electricity, gas, highways, insurance, bank, what are you told? – please wait – for 1 hours and 25 minutes, please wait.

They say you can leave your number and they will get back to you – but no we wait because we don't trust them.

Is the real idol – the calf or is it simply impatience?

If Moses came back sooner from the mountain – would they have built the golden "calf".

God took too long!

Was it God's fault that they build the golden 'calf'?

Moses was up the mountain with God 40 days and 40 nights.

I could last that long – couldn't you?

I could stop sinning for 40 days and 40 nights – what about you? (I am hardly serious.)

Among the many golden calves I have lack of patience is one of the biggest.

My lack of patience – would be an Angus – on a scale of Jersey to Brahman.

What are the golden calves of 2023?

How many excuses do we have for not honouring the Lord's Day by coming together with brothers and sisters in Christ to receive from God and rest from unnecessary work? "

"I'm traveling"

"I've got soccer, or cricket, or this club or that club'.

"I'm tired."

One of the most popular excuses for Christians these days is something like this: "I'd rather go for a hike because I find God in nature."

God has 2 responses to that excuse:

Jesus said "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

And He says "even a fool can see God in nature"

Is money our golden calf?

Are we willing to bend the rules to make a quick buck? Are we willing to sacrifice family time for our career, our farm, our business.

Is our golden calf a new iPhone?

Is it technology - technology that morphs into hours of sitting and watching, that morphs into a sloth?

Is it food? Or alcohol? Or cigarettes? Or something else?

The Golden Calf – the golden laugh – the golden insult.

To put a calf before God – it could have at least been a bull.

And such a shoddy slap-up calf at that.

It reminds us of the pathetic things we put up as golden calves?

God or an iPhone?

God or watching a game of football on TV?

You know our bibles have these little un-helpful sub-titles to each account.

These sub-titles are added by man – they're not in the original.

Today's is "the story of the Golden Calf". Immediately, that subtitle drags our attention to the puny, scrawny, shoddy, golden jersey calf.

If I were to put a subtitle to this story it would have to be the story of "the grace of God brought about by Moses' interceding on our behalf".

God looked down on the Israelites.

He saw the pathetic calf in place of him, he saw an "orgy of lewdness", and he notes "how quickly" this all happened.

God said to Moses, "*leave me alone so that my anger can burn and then I can destroy them*" - This is the heart of the story.

And here is the heart of the heart. Moses did not run away from the presence an angry, offended almighty God.

He stood in the presence of an angry, offended, almighty God and pleaded for his people – as a true ambassador would.

He argued, he reasoned, he begged – not so much for the sake of the people, but so that the name of God would not be put in the same bag as the Egyptian God s who destroy.

It says: "*then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened*".

A miracle of intercession, a miracle of grace.

A man on a cross said, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they divided his clothes and cast lots. The rulers also insulted him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.*

A miracle of intercession, a miracle of Grace.

It's amazing how quickly Israel sinned and how far they had fallen by worshipping the golden calf.

Yet, there is something more amazing.

It's the amazing grace of God.

While we were yet sinners Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

While we were/are worshipping the Golden Jersey – Jesus died for us. Jesus died, the just for the unjust, to bring us back to God (1 Peter 3:18).

From my reading, and knowing a fair bit about calves, it is the calf itself that is the offence to me – something so weak, so dependant, to represent a god – supposedly better than the God of Israel.

You could almost assume, from my thinking at least, that a mighty full-grown Bull – a muscled Angus – or my favourite, a tall Braman bull, would at least a bit better than a calf.

But even a mighty Bull would still be a man-made attempt.

Remember the tower of Babylon?

It was an idol – but at least a mighty one. “Come, *let us build ourselves a city and a tower whose top reaches to the heavens. And let us make a name for ourselves*”

A mighty plan – far more comparable to God than a scrawny calf - But even so God said, Let ‘us’ (plural) go down and see what they are up to”. And with just a thought he divided their language into languages, and it says they stopped building the city.

A golden calf, a mighty city with a tower into heaven, an iPhone, a game of football.

Jesus says, Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

And to seal this he took our idolism to the cross – there is no greater love. Galatians 5:1 “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

Go in the freedom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Holy Spirit walk with us every day and reveal our idolatry so that we can take it to the cross and receive Jesus promise of forgiveness. Amen.