

During a recent transatlantic flight the pilot came over the loudspeaker, "We have lost the power of three of our engines, the cabin is depressurising and it looks as though we must ditch the plane in the ocean. Please remain calm, fasten your seat belts, and remain seated until further notice." One of the stewardesses noticed a man wearing a clerical collar and urged him to do something religious. He promptly took up a collection.

That story is so old and corny that I tell it with some embarrassment but it relates directly to our Scripture lesson. In our narrative Moses and Pharaoh are negotiating a labor dispute. Moses wants Pharaoh to release the Israelites so they can worship the Lord. Pharaoh doesn't want to give in to these audacious demands. He offers three compromises in order to retain his work force. First, in chapter 8, he says, "I will let you go to offer sacrifices to the Lord your God in the desert, but you must not go very far." The second compromise is found in chapter 10:11,

"Have only the men go; and worship the Lord."  
The third compromise is found in our Scripture lesson, "Go, worship the Lord. Even your women and children may go with you; only leave your flocks and herds behind."

Pharaoh knew the power of our possessions. As long as he had their possessions at his disposal he could safely trust them to go into the desert to worship the Lord for a day without fear of having them run away. He knew they would come back to Egypt, back to slavery, if only he maintained a tight grip on their possessions. Pharaoh offered them freedom to go and worship but he was like the husband who cruelly enslaves his wife and makes her entirely dependent upon him, who has all the possessions in his name, and then magnanimously tells the wife, "Go ahead and leave if you want to. I won't stop you."

Now in a way it seems that this story would be better and more religious if Moses had agreed to this compromise. All Israel

would have left their possessions in Egypt and crossed the Red Sea singing, "Take the world but give me Jesus." Somehow it doesn't seem very religious, very spiritual for Moses to insist on taking their possessions with them. What difference do possessions make as long as we have the freedom to worship God? But Moses knew that God had called his people to total freedom not just "religious" freedom. The freedom he wanted his people to enjoy was political and economic as well as spiritual. Their cattle and possessions were necessary items in the worship of the Lord. ~~Moses knew that God had called his people to total freedom not just "religious" freedom. The freedom he wanted his people to enjoy was political and economic as well as spiritual. Their cattle and possessions were necessary items in the worship of the Lord.~~ Moses knew that God's people cannot worship God as they should apart from offerings. Moses knew that God

may require the use of any of our possessions as we seek to serve him. As Moses said, "Our livestock too must go with us; not a hoof is to be left behind. We have to use some of them in worshipping the Lord our God, and until we get there we will not know what we are to use to worship the Lord."

Our Scripture lesson teaches us something terribly important about our worship of God. It is a very religious action to take up an offering. Offerings are a necessary part of our worship of God. The presentation of our tithes and offerings in a sense is the high point of our worship. When we come to worship God we should think of our service climaxing, not with the sermon, but with the offering as our response to the written and preached Word of God. John Calvin was absolutely correct, I believe, when he listed the giving of tithes and offerings as one of the fundamental requirements of the worship of God.

Unfortunately we Christians are constantly confronted with Pharaohs compromise

and too often we agree to it. We worship God in the desert and we leave our possessions in Egypt. How do we leave our possessions in Egypt? Whenever we do not have the freedom to offer all that we have to God, whenever the control of our possessions is in the hands of someone other than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ we have left our possessions in Egypt.

Let me give you three illustrations of what it means to leave our possessions in Egypt, in the house of bondage. First, indebtedness. The more heavily in debt we are the greater is the control of Pharaoh on our possessions. The greater our debts, the less freedom we have to do as God would have us do. The writer of Proverbs said, "The borrower is servant to the lender." Pro. 22:7 Some of us are so deeply in debt that we cannot worship God with our tithes. We say we can't afford to tithe because we wouldn't be able to make our monthly payments on our Visas and Mastercharges, our houses

and lands. We are supposed to serve God with our possessions but when we are in worldly debt "The borrower is servant to the lender."

Now I know that it's almost impossible for us not to incur debts. Few of us are wealthy enough to buy a home outright. Few of us have enough money to buy a new car for cash. And as Thanksgiving and Christmas approach there will be greater and greater pressures placed upon us to buy on credit. And I must confess that I have a Visa card and that I am in debt/ I have cut up my credit cards on a number of occasions. I know how difficult it is not to incur debts. I give in too often to buy things on credit. But I also know that the deeper in Debt I am the less free I am. And the deeper in debt I am the greater are the pressures upon me not to worship God with my tithes. Oh, we might continue to worship God. We leave the world and Egypt on Sunday morning and we worship

the Lord but do we leave our possessions in Egypt?

Secondly, when we become so concerned about our possessions and the increase of our wealth that we spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about money and houses and lands, again, we are not free to worship God as we ought. Our bodies are in the sanctuary worshipping God but our hearts and souls are in Egypt with our possessions.

This is something I am just discovering. Before I got married I took out an insurance policy which would help me to save money. But now I realize I can earn far more interest if I cancel that policy and take all the money accrued and invest it in a money market account. In the last couple of weeks I have found myself thinking and mulling over the various options. ~~I have.~~ While I'm preparing my sermons I'm thinking of money markets. When I am praying, I am thinking about interest rates. On the one hand I think of the parable of the

talents which reminds me that I should try to increase the talents God has given me. But on the other hand I think of the parable of the rich fool who thought so much about increasing his barns that he forgot about God and that one day his soul would be required of him.

I don't know how much time you spend keeping up on the stock market, or worrying about your money and possessions but we need to ask ourselves, "Is it worth the time."

Thirdly, we leave our possessions in Egypt when we fail to see or to acknowledge that any or all of our possessions may be required by God as we seek to serve him. All that we have, our time, our money, our material possessions, our talents are to be used to serve the Lord. God may not require us to give our home away, or to sell our car in order to support some ministry but he may. We know that God requires a tithe of our possessions. We don't know how much more



or what else he will require of us. But with Moses we say "We have to use some of them in worshipping the Lord our God, and until we get there we will not know what we are to use to worship the Lord." So we must not leave any of our possessions in Egypt. We must not hold back anything from God if he requires it of us.

Are not some of you leaving your talents in Egypt by not signing up for one of the session committees; to give some of your time and abilities and interests to see the church built up? Some of us may give our tithes but we leave our time and our talents in Egypt. I thank God for those of you who graciously open your homes for the START dinners, for Bible studies; and for traveling missionaries or evangelists like Dr. Winter and Dr. Wick. But all of us have left some things in Egypt because we think they are too insignificant to be used in the worship of God. There are several

occasions in the Bible when that which was offered to God was seemingly insignificant, yet it was blessed to meet the needs of many. I think of David's little sling-shot, the widow's two mites, the small boy's lunch which Jesus used to feed five thousand. Or think of Dorcas' Needle. Think now of the little things in your life which you have left in Egypt that God wants you to use for His glory. Make a list of them. Use them to glorify God. I urge you once again, all of you have something to offer God through participation in one of our session committees. If you have not signed up or committed yourselves to one of these committees ask yourself, "What have I left in Egypt that God wants me to use to glorify him?"

Fourth, I felt that I had to mention one more thing. I almost left it out because it didn't sound very spiritual. But it seems to me that we American Christians take the part of Pharaoh when we tell our

Christian brothers and sisters in South Africa, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile and Argentina not to be concerned about their economic poverty as long as they can worship the Lord. Now I do not endorse what is known as liberation theology but I do believe that we, American Christians, will have to answer one day before God for the part our nation has sometimes played by taking sides with Pharaoh, investing in corporations and nations which economically enslave the vast majority of people in those countries.

Where your treasure is there will your heart be also. If your treasures are in Egypt<sup>t</sup> then your heart will be there. Taking up the offering is one of the most religious things we can do if it represents our desire to use all our possessions to glorify God. Have you left some of your treasures in Egypt? Are you letting the world, the flesh, and the devil control your pocket-book? Take a

few moments to examine your hearts...How do you spend your money? How do you use your treasures; your time, your home, your car, your money? Are you giving some of your money to Pharaoh, to use to strengthen his kingdom? e.g., The state lottery, etc. The money that we give to the church for the work of the church is important but what hope is there for the growth and strengthening of the kingdom of God if an equal amount of our money is used to strengthen the kingdom of Satan?

I think of the policy of our state dept. which I have never fully understood. We arm Israel and we arm Saudi Arabia her enemy. We Christians do the same things. We give, too often, perhaps as much as 10% to the work of the kingdom of Christ but how do we use the other 90%? Are you using it to arm the kingdom of Satan. Is God speaking to you?