

A Contribution of the Heart

Exodus 35:4-10; Psalm 8; John 3:16-17

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As soon as we turn the calendar to the month of November, we begin to think about the Thanksgiving holiday.

- We think about who will be at our table;
- we think about what will be served at the meal;
- we think about what will not be discussed.

Most of all we think about the blessings that have been placed into our lives and we give thanks to one another and to God.

The Hebrews had much for which to be thankful. They had been rescued by God, with the help of Moses and Aaron, and brought into freedom. They now find themselves in the desert. They will be there for some time. Moses has received the Commandments from God at Mount Sinai. God is using the leadership of Moses to teach these newly freed people how to follow the God, Yahweh, as their Lord.

We need to look at this situation in the context in which it is happening. Abraham had taken his family to Egypt when he left Ur. Over the decades that followed his descendants had lived a good life in the land. Joseph, a descendent of Abraham, through a series of events enabled by God, had become the Prime Minister and had actually saved the nation from the effects of a killing drought. Joseph died and was buried in a *mastaba*, a kind of tomb reserved for persons to whom high honor was given.

As time passed a new Pharaoh came into power who “knew not Joseph,” a Pharaoh who loved power and feared for his position. This was the Pharaoh who was in power when his daughter rescued the infant Moses from the Nile River.

Being fearful that the Hebrews might attempt a takeover of the government, the Pharaoh called for the murder of all infant boys and placed the adult men into slavery.

As the Hebrews fled Egypt, they took with them the bones of Joseph. Their revered ancestor would not be left behind.

Now Moses is impressed by God that the people need a tent of meeting, a tabernacle, where they can meet God in worship. These people are in a process of spiritual formation. They are learning how to *be* the people that God has called them to be. They must be taught through the experience of worship. Now it was time to offer a visible, tangible, response to God.

When they had fled Egypt, these former slaves had been instructed to ask of the Egyptians the wealth of their possessions. Being only too glad to do whatever was necessary to get rid of them, the Egyptians gave them the wealth of the nation.

Moses comes to these covenanting people with a request from God. It is a request to bring an offering from their wealth and contribute it to the construction of the tabernacle. They people brought gold,

silver, fine cloth, fine wood, gemstones, and all things of value that were needed for construction of the tabernacle and construction of the tabernacle began. The contributions continued until finally the general contractor, Bazelai went to Moses and said, "Moses, tell the people that we have more than enough. Tell them to stop contributing."

That would be every church treasurer's dream! Has there ever been a time when you have been told that we have more than enough to do all the ministry that we do, so don't give any more money?

That was not the last time that God asked for a contribution of our resources. Under later Old Testament Law the Hebrew people were required to bring a tithe of their earnings, a tithe of their farm produce, a tenth of their annual earnings.

If we look closely at God's request, there are some things that it is NOT.

- It was not "bring money and resources to support the programs and the ministries that will be done in the tabernacle;"
- It was not "bring money and resources so that the wrath of God will not come down upon you."

God was saying to them, and says to us:

- "bring a contribution to ME";
- "bring those things that have value, not just to ME, but to YOU";
- "bring a contribution so that in your midst there will be a place that is holy unto the Lord, a place where you can worship and go forth with a continually renewed relationship with ME";
- "bring a contribution because we are in covenant; we are in relationship with one another."

A friend of mine tells the story of when he was a child. He was too young to legally work but his mother was a single mother and he wanted to help. They lived in an apartment upstairs over the mom and pop grocery store. The owner, knowing their situation, gave the lad an after-school job of sweeping the floor of the store. At the end of the first week, he paid the boy with cash divided into three envelopes, one for himself, one for his mother, and one for his tithe for the church. When the young boy asked about the third envelope, the store owner replied. "I'm Jewish. I tithe because it is the Law. You are Christian. How much more should you give because of grace!"

Could it have been that those Hebrews in the desert brought a generous contribution because they remembered how great was their redemption? They had left behind the gods of the Egyptians. Now they were becoming a transformed people who were learning how to worship the true God, Yahweh.

We have something in common with them. We are also a people who have experienced God's redemption, God's forgiveness from sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus. How different our lives might be if we had not experienced such great grace, such great redemption!

It is good for us to remember that while we may

- hold titles and deeds to properties,
 - possess many things of value, and
 - be blessed with financial resources,
- everything we have we simply hold "in trust."

We are the

- caretakers,
- managers,
- stewards, of all that God has placed at our disposal.

To help us understand this, God said, "The world is Mine and all that it contains." (Psalm 24:1)

Like those people of long ago, may we continually be a people who are being transformed by the grace that Jesus has made possible, people who are

- not yet perfect,
- not yet having attained all for which we strive,
- but always in the process of becoming more and more like Christ.

Our giving is an expression of worship because in the giving of our possessions we first give of ourselves.

Just as God gave all that God had to make possible redemption in our lives, and give us abundant life now, so we in return, as an expression of thanksgiving give of ourselves and our resources to God.
Amen.