

## Adult sermon notes

Each adult in Britain contributes just over £1 per day to keep cows alive in Europe; sixty million people live on the equivalent of £1 per day. This shocking contrast is found in the Bible itself. It begins with a celebration of God's abundance, a richness entrusted to men and women for their blessing and enjoyment. Yet Exodus 1 shows God's people enslaved and far from celebrating anything. The Bible tells us they are broken and crushed in spirit (Exodus 6:9). This experience is shared by millions in the world. The story of Ashique in [Warming Up, Warming Down](#) illustrates the point perfectly.

Over the next few weeks we will be exploring lessons from Exodus about how as Christian people we handle our money and possessions. Inevitably we will be talking mostly about the discipleship and decisions of individual Christians because it must be real for us. But Exodus is about the freedom and formation of a *people*. If what we say in church to individuals does not touch on the reality of poverty experienced by millions then we have misunderstood the scriptures. Our individual actions and decisions are all caught up in a complex economic system that ensures that some are wealthy beyond their imagining while millions live at or below subsistence level. There are difficult questions for Christians around how we can meaningfully withdraw our consent to injustice while at the same time living realistically and making our choices in a complex world. Where do we start?

### Abundance to share

We start where the Bible starts with a celebration of the abundance and the goodness of all that God has given to us. This is the purpose of the creation theme in the all-age resources. The following story can be elaborated by way of an illustration: *In the aftermath of WW2 one of the saddest sights was the number of orphans roaming the streets, hungry and cold and dismayed. A GI saw a child looking in at a bakery watching doughnuts being prepared. The soldier asked the boy if he wanted one, bought a bag of twelve and gave them to the child. As he walked away He felt a tug on his greatcoat. The boy said: 'Mr, are you God?' We are never more like God than when we give: 'for God so loved the world that he gave*

What we have of money is in the nature of gift and blessing and it is precisely this that requires us to be stewards. The Exodus story begins in Genesis 47 where we find Jacob offered land in Egypt. Gen 47:1-12 illustrates a biblical principle: the needy are welcomed

and provided for, the land is shared and Pharaoh is blessed by Jacob.

### Control and captivity

In Genesis 47:13ff something else creeps into the picture. When the people come pleading for food Joseph first takes their money, then their livestock and finally in desperation they offer Pharaoh their land and themselves. As Walter Brueggemann notes, Israel was enslaved by an economic transaction begun in time of famine and made effective (Exodus 1) when Pharaoh feared that Israel threatened what he had accumulated.

The Exodus narrative alerts us to the capacity of money to distort our hearts and the systems by which we handle money. In short, that which is received as a gift becomes our possession. We do not need to be excessively rich as Pharaoh to experience the subtle ways in which the desire to accumulate can creep up on us. The fear of losing what we have or of not having enough can ensnare and enslave us, driving us to hold tightly to what we have. So generous giving is an issue of discipleship and obedience before it can be the liberating experience of which Jesus and Paul speak. Our cage might have golden bars, but it is still a cage.

### Life in all its fullness

That is why Jesus spoke so much about money and possessions; much more in fact that he said about faith or prayer or the Holy Spirit. As Carol Johnston points out, it can hardly be because he was obsessed by money itself. This was the man who had no home, relied on women for his needs and had to borrow money to pay his own taxes! What Jesus was really obsessed about was the abundant life that he promises to those who follow him. But he knows that what we do with our money will either hinder or help us in living that abundant life. Fear and anxiety and lack of generosity are poor conductors of a gracious and abundant life. We can live in the pattern of sharing and blessing or become captive to the power of money. Surely that is why Jesus posed the issue in such a stark manner: "You cannot serve God and money". Money undoubtedly gives power, choice and freedom and we would not deny that these are blessings. But money does not guarantee the quality of the choices we make nor of the way in which we use that power and freedom. These next few weeks will explore how Israel learned to live as a free people and handle the blessing of the gifts they received as they left Egypt.