

March 8, 2021

Read Exodus 23

Key verse: Exodus 23:9

*You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.*

### **Knowing Another's Heart**

Most everyone has heard of the verbal *faux pas* attributed to Marie Antoinette, Queen of France from 1774 until her untimely death in 1791. Upon learning that many of the poor in her nation had no bread to eat, Marie supposedly responded, "Let them eat cake" (the actual expression was "Let them eat *brioche*." *Brioche* is a kind of bread enriched by butter and eggs). The famous phrase is illustrative of the utter naivety of the nobility to the plight of the poor, a naivety that results from a life lived in affluence, completely sheltered from those who live lives of deprivation.

We may not be as naïve as Marie Antoinette, but how many of us know what it's like to be starving? The worst deprivation I've ever experienced is a lack of some food items that results from a "run on the shelves" at the supermarket prior to a snow storm. I feel inconvenienced when my favorite restaurant is closed on the day I want to order takeout. But what does real *want* feel like? The only way to know is to experience it ourselves.

The faith journey of the Israelites included four hundred years of slavery in a foreign land, slavery that involved genocide – the killing of their babies. But as horrible as that experience must have been, it transformed them as a people in a positive way, thanks to God. The Israelites might have taken the attitude of vengeance, of striving to "get even" with their oppressors. They could simply give God thanks for bringing them out of their terrible predicament and simply lived lives of profound gratitude. But God took them further than that. God *instructed them* not to treat the strangers in their own land the way that the Egyptians treated strangers in *their* land. God reminded them that their suffering in Egypt was a lesson about how *not* to treat strangers. God wanted his people to *empathize* with the stranger, and one is better able to empathize having experienced the same hardships *yourself*. The better we know the true plight of others, the more compassionate our response will be.

**Prayer:** God of Justice, none of us want to suffer, but we pray that we would at least respond compassionately to the suffering of others, that we would be able to "put ourselves in their shoes" without misjudging them or stereotyping them. Help us to open our eyes to the struggles that others endure daily, and lead us to act in ways that diminish those struggles. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.