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Into nine words, having altogether but eleven syllables, Luke packs a world of universal truth: "Being let go, they went to their own company" (Acts 4:23).

Every normal man has a "company," however small, where he feels at home and to which he will return when he is tired of being alone. The important thing about a man is not where he goes when he is compelled to go, but where he goes when he is free to go where he will. The apostles went to jail, and that is not too revealing because they went there against their will; but when they got out of jail and could go where they would, they immediately went to the praying company. From this we learn a great deal about them. The choices of life, not the compulsions, reveal character. A man is absent from church Sunday morning. Where is he? If he is in a hospital having his appendix removed his absence tells us nothing about him except

that he is ill; but if he is out on the golf course, that tells us a lot. To go to the hospital is compulsory; to go to the golf course, voluntary. The man is free to choose and he chooses to play instead of to pray. His choice reveals what kind of man he is. Choices always do.

The difference between a slave society and a free one lies in the number of free acts possible in each as compared with acts of compulsion. No society is wholly slave, as none is wholly free, but in a free society the voluntary choices are at a maximum and the acts of compulsion relatively few. In the slave society the proportions are exactly reversed.

The true character of a people is revealed in the uses it makes of its freedoms. The slave peoples do what they are told because they are not free to do what they will. It is the free nation that reveals its character by its voluntary choices. The man who "bowed by the weight of centuries... leans upon his hoe and gazes on the ground" when the long day's work is over he is glad

glad to get home to supper and to bed; he has little time for anything else. But in those fortunate lands where modern machinery and labor unions have given men many free hours out of every day and at least two free days out of every week, they have time to do almost anything they will. They are free to destroy themselves by their choices, and many of them are doing just that.

There is always danger that a free nation may imperil its freedom by a series of small choices destructive of that freedom. The liberty the fathers won in blood the sons may toss a way in prodigality and debilitating pleasures. Any nation, which for an extended period puts pleasure before liberty is likely to lose the liberty it misused.

In the realm of religion, right choices are critically important. If we Protestant Christians would retain our freedom we dare not abuse it, and it is

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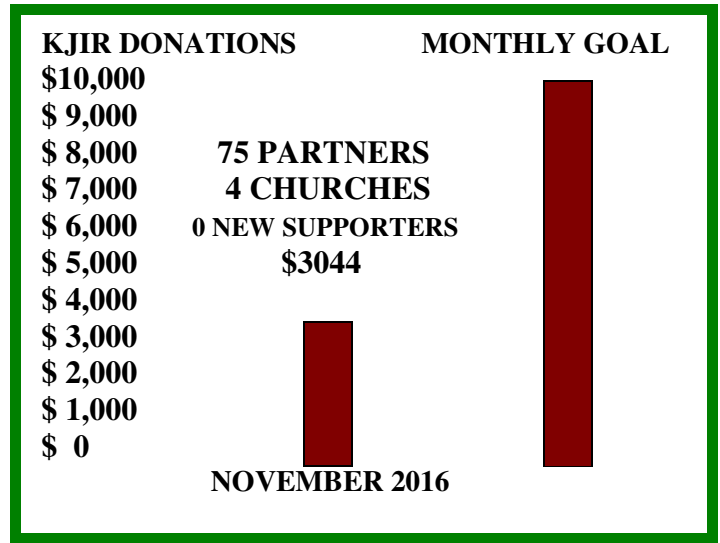
always to abuse freedom when we choose the easy way rather than the harder but better way. The casual indifference with which millions of Protestants view their God-blessed religious liberty is ominous. Being let go they go on weekends to the lakes and mountains and beaches to play shuffleboard, fish and sunbathe. They go where their heart is and come back to the praying company only when the bad weather drives them in. Let this continue long enough and evangelical Protestantism will be ripe for a takeover by Rome.

The Christian gospel is a message of freedom through grace and we must stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. But what shall we do with our freedom? The apostle Paul grieved that some of the believers of his day took advantage of their freedom and indulged the flesh in the name of Christian liberty. They threw off discipline, scorned obedience and made gods of their own bellies. It is not difficult to decide which company such as these belonged to. They revealed it by the company they kept.

Our choices reveal what kind of persons we are, but there is another side to the coin. We may, by our choices, also determine what kind of persons we will become. We humans are not only in a state of being, we are in a state of becoming; we are on a slow spiral moving gradually up or down. Here we move not singly but in companies, and we are drawn to these companies by the attraction of similarity.

I think it might be well for us to check our spiritual condition occasionally by the simple test of compatibility. When we are free to go, where do we go? In what company do we feel most at home? Where do our thoughts turn when they are free to turn where they will? When the pressure of work or business or school has temporarily lifted and we are able to think of what we will instead of what we must, what do we think of then? The answer to these questions may tell us more about ourselves than we can comfortably accept. But we had better face up to things. We haven't too much time at the most.

A.W. Tozer



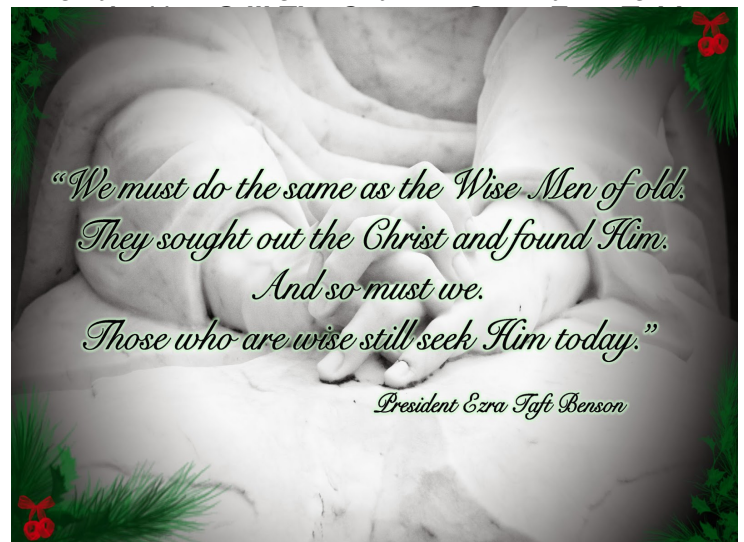
"Still The Greatest Story Ever Told"

*A woman and an angel, a promise and a song.
A word to grand for any mind to hold.
A tax law and a journey, a stable and some straw.
These tell the greatest story ever told.*

*Oh sing glory in the highest, He is come our great messiah.
Come bow before this awesome mystery.
Mighty God and fragile baby, here a lowly manger holds.
And it's still the greatest story ever told.*

*A hillside and some shepherds, a blaze of blinding light.
Angels singing carols in the cold.
Eternal revelation to men as dull as stone.
The glorious, greatest story ever told.*

*Oh sing glory in the highest, He is come our great messiah.
Come bow before this awesome mystery.
Mighty God and fragile baby, here a lowly manger holds.*



Merry Christmas from