

“Until All Are Free”

*Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering (Hebrews 13:3).
Luke 4:14-21 ¹*

In Mark’s account of Jesus’ ministry, the first thing that happened after Jesus’ wilderness experience was the calling of Jesus’ first disciples. We’ll look at that event next week.

But in Luke’s account, the first thing that happened was that Jesus “*returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit,*” went to worship in His home synagogue, and was invited to read the Scripture for the day. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him, and Jesus unrolled it to the following passage, which He read:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (Luke 4:18-19; Isaiah 61:1-2).

And then Jesus told the villagers who had known Him all His life, “*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.*”

We’ll have occasion to look more at that synagogue event on another day. Today, our focus is on what Jesus said He had come to do: *to proclaim good news to the poor; to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to set the oppressed free.* With those words ringing in your years and echoing in your heart, I invite you to watch this short video. [Jen Spry, [I Never Went Missing](#)].

I wish I could tell you that Jen’s story is unique, but sadly, it is not unique at all. Our subject this morning is human trafficking, which includes the broad categories of sex trafficking and labor trafficking, which are the shapes that slavery takes in our day.

Human trafficking is not the smuggling we hear about on the news or forced exile such as we imposed on the Native Americans. Human trafficking doesn’t require physical movement at all, although many times such movement is involved in order to make discovery of the trafficking more difficult. About 80 percent of persons trafficked in the United States are U.S. citizens; and about 80 percent of persons trafficked, both here and around the world, are women and girls.

Globally, approximately 750,000 children, women, and men are trafficked across international borders every year, with half of these being minors. UNICEF estimates that there are at least two million children enslaved in the commercial sex trade worldwide.

Taken together, reasonable estimates are that up to 45 million people are enslaved on this planet at this very moment. That is a greater number of people than the entire populations of more than 80 percent of the nations on Earth. That is more slaves in the world at this moment than were trafficked in the entire 400 years of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The sad fact is that there are more people enslaved at this very moment than at any other time in human history.

And, if that’s not bad enough, human trafficking has been reported in every one of our fifty states, and according to our own Vernon Gray, who chaired the Howard County Task Force on Human Trafficking, we in Maryland live in an area that is a “perfect storm” for trafficking. We’re

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on September 25, 2016.

on the I-95 corridor. We have a great deal of commuter movement. We have an international airport. We have casinos and cruise lines.

We have large concentrations of both poverty and wealth. We have large sports and entertainment venues. We have tourism and drug traffic. And we have inadequate laws against human trafficking. Columbia may be the best place in the country to live, but that unfortunately means that we really do “have it all.”

After drug dealing, human trafficking (both sex and labor) is tied with the illegal arms industry as the second largest criminal industry in the world, and trafficking is the fastest-growing criminal industry, generating perhaps as much as *\$150 billion every year*. That’s a LOT of money, because, unlike drugs, people can be sold again . . . and again . . . and again. The Polaris Project in DC has estimated that an average pimp with four girls can make well over \$600,000 every year.

Whether they are trafficking in sex or in labor, traffickers tend to use similar methods, all of which are grounded in deceit. Here’s just one example:

When 14-year-old Manna ran away from her abusive home in India, she met a woman who offered her a job selling fabric. She accepted the position, and the woman provided her a place to sleep for the night. When Manna awoke in the morning, the woman was gone, and Manna discovered that she was in a brothel. For the next two years she was held in the brothel and raped by customers for the profit of the brothel owners.²

Although Manna was eventually freed through the work of International Justice Ministries (IJM), fully one-third of all the people enslaved today are enslaved in her home country of India.

Forced-labor slavery—the non-sexual kind of slavery—is typically imposed by the promise of work or the making of a small loan—sometimes just \$25—which is to be repaid by the borrower’s working for the lender. The lender then ensures that repayment is impossible by refusing to pay the “employee” and by inflating the loan through false charges and exorbitant interest rates. The laborer is forbidden to leave the lender’s property until the “loan” is repaid, and the borrower’s relatives, often including children, are also enlisted and enslaved to work off a false and ever-growing “debt.” Here is a story of that sort: [[Kumar’s story](#)].

Happily, there are thousands of stories like Kumar’s thanks to the work of International Justice Mission (IJM), the largest international anti-slavery organization in the world. IJM’s mission is to **“Rescue thousands. Protect millions. Prove that justice for the poor is possible.”**

Located just down the road in northern Virginia, IJM works against human trafficking in nearly twenty communities in the most strategic areas of the world. In the twenty years of its existence, IJM has secured the release of thousands of enslaved persons and has secured well over 1,000 convictions of slave owners, rapists, and other criminals.

With a global staff of over 700 Christian lawyers, criminal investigators, social workers, pastors, and many other specialists, IJM investigates and documents cases of human trafficking and then works with local law enforcement within the country’s own legal system to emancipate slaves and bring slaveholders to justice. IJM also works to secure quality aftercare for victims.

² She was freed when IJM investigators discovered her captivity and alerted local authorities, working with them to release her and three other young girls from the brothel. The brothel owners each received five year sentences for their crimes, and Manna was brought to an aftercare home to heal in security.

Although Kumar remembers his rescue as a quick, life-changing turn of events, that rescue was the result of months of careful research, documentation, and planning. And today, years later, Kumar is a Christian, a college student, a deep thinker, a fantastic dancer, and a member of IJM's team on the ground in Bangalore, India.

That's good news—indeed, it's very good news—but there are 45 million other “Kumar's” who also yearn for freedom. Here's another short video that emphasizes the work that remains to be done: [[Until All Are Free](#)].

That's what IJM is doing. But how about what **we** could do? As Frederick Douglass preached over 160 years ago, “let the people of God array their immense powers against slavery and slaveholding, and the whole system of crime and blood would be scattered to the winds.”

It can seem pretty overwhelming to consider 45 million people in slavery, but God has a plan to end slavery on Planet Earth . . . and *we—you and I—are that plan*. The challenge may seem impossible, but Malcolm Gladwell has helped us to see that here, as in many other things, there is a “tipping point”—that critical point beyond which an unstoppable effect or change takes place.³

We are closer to reaching that tipping point with respect to slavery than we have ever been before. IJM has travelled deep into the darkness of modern-day slavery, and they report that there are many cracks in the walls of this ancient fortress. Indeed, if we pull together, and with God's help, IJM believes those walls can come down in our lifetimes. If we can end smallpox, we can end slavery.

We know this is the purpose of God. Jesus has told us so. You and I can be among the New Abolitionists. We can be slavery's end. And, as William Wilberforce told the British long ago as he fought to end the trans-Atlantic slave trade, “You may choose to look the other way, but you can never again say that you did not know.”

So what can YOU do to end slavery? As with most things, there are three options: we can PRAY. We can GIVE. And we can GO. Here's what that might look like . . .

PRAY: I will post with the online version of this sermon several additional resources, including a guide for prayer.

GIVE: While there are many ways to support anti-slavery work, I invite you to join Jill and me in becoming a Freedom Partner with IJM. You can do this for a little as \$24 a month (over and above your tithe). You have information in your bulletin and there's more on the table at the door. (www.ijm.org/fp)

GO: IJM has provided a tool for churches called “Community Justice Assessment.” If you'd be interested in forming a small study group to work through this book as it might relate to our neighborhood, please let me know.

Here's one more short video, and then Megan will put this challenge to music. [[Freedom Partners](#)].

³ Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Back Bay Books, 2002).