

Slavery In 2007?

Seven years ago, Sandy Shepherd got an unexpected phone call as she headed to her daughter's high school musical rehearsal. A mother of three, living in affluent neighborhood near Fort Worth, Texas, she was already beginning to imagine life as an empty nester. She wasn't thinking about changing the world.

On the line was a deacon from her church, First Baptist. He told her that the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) had just picked up seven Zambian boys_all part of a touring choir they both knew. First Baptist had hosted the choir previously. The boys needed a place to stay or they would spend the night in jail.

Could she house all seven overnight?

Shepherd took a deep breath. For two years, she had passionately supported this choir, utterly unaware that she and her church were being duped.

As it turns out a Baptist missionary, Keith Grimes, had recruited the boys to tour America with his ministry. Grimes had made big promises to the boys and their families. He had inspired them with talk of salaries, an American education, and stipends for families back in Zambia.

Grimes had claimed the tour would raise money for the grindingly poor shantytown where these boys lived.

It was a brilliant scam. The ministry never paid the boys a dime or built new schools. It pocketed all the sponsorship money. In fact one year it took in \$1 million.

All this is very timely in light of the fact that we have the India Children's Choir coming next month. Fortunately The India Childrens Choir is completely legitimate.

When the fraud was discovered, Shepherd and others had done everything they could to stop it, but had failed.

The boys spoke little English. Their mother tongue had no word for slave. By the time of the phone call, Shepherd was disengaged from the choir. She had channeled her outrage into something productive. She had joined other American Christians aware of the scam,

and they had built a village school, using their own money.

In January 2000, the choir scam imploded. After the boys sang in a Houston church, they quit in disgust and exhaustion. Their manager telephoned the INS, demanding their immediate deportation to Zambia.

Sandy Shepherd wondered if she was emotionally up to this.

The deacon laid out the boys' plight. The teens hadn't done wrong. The INS only had housing available in a federal jail. Could she meet him at 7 at the church?

As Shepherd drove her van to her church, she begged God: "Lord, I don't want to be involved in this anymore. Why are you calling me back?"

A song she sang in First Baptist's choir popped into her head: "Yes, Lord, yes, I will answer the call."

That night, the seven boys slept in her home, and the course of her family's life was changed forever_especially through the Shepherds' relationship with one of the boys, a skinny 13-year-old orphan named Given Kachepa.

Sandy and her husband took him in and enrolled him in the eighth grade. During the following years, the Shepherds included him in every family portrait, paid for braces on his teeth, and coached him through high school and into college.

These days, Kachepa and Shepherd are an unlikely duo: a freed modern-day slave and his reluctant liberator. They travel nationally, advising other victims of human trafficking, pushing lawmakers to make enforcement of antislavery laws a priority, and speaking at antislavery events.

I. Two Hundred Years After William Wilberforce Campaigned To Abolish The Slave Trade Within The British Empire, Slavery Continues.

See, what Kachepa and Shepherd are doing is combating an ancient scourge that has never really gone away.

Experts estimate there are 27 million slaves worldwide today, more than at any time in human history. About 17,000 are trafficked annually into the United States.

Gary Haugen founder of International Justice Mission says, "They are not slaves in a

metaphorical sense. They are held in forced servitude by other human beings."

Shepherd, Kachepa, and Haugen are part of an alliance of modern Wilberforces. This alliance is a bit ordinary and extraordinary at the same time.

Each person has been deeply challenged by modern slavery and willing to pay the high price of personal involvement.

Their ranks include politicians, pastors, lawyers, bureaucrats, missionaries, social workers.

Modern-day slave trading, called human trafficking, funnels slaves into two types of forced servitude: sex and labor.

Sex slavery can include prostitution, pornography, working strip clubs. Traffickers force labor slaves into farming, sewing, brick making, camel jockeying, cigarette rolling, domestic servitude, waging war—even singing hymns in churches. About 80 percent of slaves are women or children such as Kachepa.

Kevin Bales, a Quaker sociology professor at a London university and founder of Free the Slaves and author of Disposable People says, "If you can make money from a choir, there's a criminal who might want to try that.

Still, that one flipped me, and I thought I'd heard everything."

Between the 1700s and 1860s, lawmakers banned slave trade and ownership in Europe and the Americas. In 1948, the United Nations condemned it in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Worldwide, most people have considered the victory complete. But the laws, just drove slavery underground, and some nations don't even attempt to enforce existing laws.

February 23 was the 200th anniversary of the British Parliament's vote to ban the slave trade in British colonies.

It was also the release date of the movie, "Amazing Grace." The film chronicles the fight of William Wilberforce against slavery.

Wilberforce was elected to the Parliament in 1780 at the age of 21. In 1785 he trusted Jesus Christ as Savior. Wilberforce wanted to leave politics but with the encouragement of John Newton, author of the hymn "Faith's Review & Expectation," which you know as "Amazing Grace," he stayed.

Newton had been a hardened slave trader that God redeemed. That's why he wrote "Amazing Grace." He knew the grace of God first hand.

In 1789 Wilberforce made his first major speech in the House of Commons challenging slavery. He went against the tide for decades.

Twenty years after he made that first speech, in March of 1807 slavery was finally abolished.

The question for us is does the Bible speak to the issue of slavery? If it does what can we learn living in a time when slavery is more prevalent than at any other time in history?

Open your Bibles to Ephesians 6 page 1041

Five weeks ago we began to look at the Bible's directions for relationships.

We started with Ephesians 5:21 which says we're to be *submitting to one another in the fear of God*.

That's been our launch pad for looking at the verses that follow. What we've seen is how God expects us to live out His commands in the hardest place of all, and that's our relationships.

What God has done is use the pen of a first century apostle named Paul to take us out of the church service where we can all sit with pious looks on our faces and give the impression we're spiritual and put us right in the middle of home and family where we can't fool anybody.

Our willingness to submit to one another, to prefer one another, to treat each other like Jesus has treated us is the measure and the test of the reality of our Christian walk.

So this section has been all about modeling Jesus to one another.

We can always excuse ourselves and our actions by comparing ourselves to other people. It's just human nature. You know, you're in school and you get a "C" on a test and who do you look around to find?

You're not looking for the people that got the "A." You don't want to compare yourself with them. That's too painful. You want to find out who got a "D." That way you can feel

better about your "C."

That's why the Bible says in II Corinthians 10:12 that those who measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves among themselves, are not wise.

There's a legitimate point of comparison, it's Jesus Christ.

He is our Master and our King. He's the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. The ruler of the kings of the Earth. The Lord of Creation. The origin of all things.

But He didn't consider His equality with God a thing to be grasped on to. He humbled Himself. He made Himself of no reputation.

If it were only the incarnation that would be astonishing enough. If it were just that our Creator became one of his created ones we would be dumbfounded.

But here's the clincher. The Second person of the Trinity didn't take on humanity just to see what it was like to be human. That's a side benefit. God knows how we feel because He became one of us.

That's important, but the core of God's purpose was to bridge the gap between sinful humans and His own holiness. It was to do more than to be that sympathetic Great High Priest who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities.

It was to be a sin offering.

One hundred and seven times in the Old Testament God explained to His people, Israel about sin offerings. A sin offering was a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the people.

Those sin offerings, though, were offered over and over repeatedly.

That's because the Bible says, *For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.* Hebrews 10:4

Hebrews 7:27 *Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.*

Salvation is of the Lord. Our God is a God who saves.

Can you grab hold of that truth?

We should be absolutely stunned, confounded, and blown away. We should be flummoxed! (I had to throw that one in because I was looking in a thesaurus this week and I came across flummoxed and thought “What a great word!”)

It means “astonished.”

Our Lord, Master, Creator, God became one of us to die as a sacrifice to purchase our forgiveness.

Without Him we’d be headed for hell but God provided salvation for all who believe.

Listen to this exceptional promise that’s all based on the cross and the empty tomb: *He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.* I John 5:12-13

He’s is our example of submission and when we look at what our God has done for us we have no excuse for not serving one another.

Now once again we’re going to see how that applies to a tough issue of life. This time it’s the issue of slavery.

I. *Two Hundred Years After William Wilberforce Campaigned To Abolish The Slave Trade Within The British Empire, Slavery Continues.*

II. *The Bible Undermines Slavery At It’s Most Basic Level*

Read verses 5-8

Verse 5 begins with a directive to Christian bondservants. The word translated “bondservant” is the Greek noun *doulos*. It’s a very common word that means “slave.” This isn’t a word to the hired help. These were people who were actually owned by Roman citizens within the Empire.

It’s estimated that by the time of the New Testament about half the population of the Roman Empire were slaves.

They constituted most of the work force. Slaves were household servants, heavy laborers, but they were also doctors, teachers, some even administered wealthy Roman

households.

Slavery was woven into the very fabric of Roman society.

Slaves could be inherited, purchased, or acquired in a settlement of a debt. Prisoners of war were commonly used as slaves.

As Rome moved out to dominate the ancient world they captured slaves from the countries they over ran. If they were well educated they were worth even more on the auction block.

The thing to remember was, this went on in a totally matter-of-fact way. This was just life. The average Roman never gave a second thought to the morality of slavery.

The only group that didn't accept slavery as natural was the slaves.

Aristotle wrote, For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.

It is clear, then, that some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and right.

Of course, before we come down too hard on Aristotle, we need to remember that there were some otherwise learned preachers in the South who vehemently defended slavery during the Civil War.

Our own Supreme Court said that slaves were not persons with protection by the Constitution. That decision, Dred Scott was made just 150 years ago.

In the Roman world slaves were dehumanized by the laws. Their masters could treat them any way they choose, to the point of torturing and murdering them.

The startling thing is, that into this distorted situation that the Bible speaks in a totally unexpected way.

It says, "Slaves serve your masters like you were serving Jesus Christ."

That's brought some real confusion for people.

Some observation:

1. Christianity doesn't end our relationship to existing social, political, and economic conditions.

For instance, some Christians said that since they had become believers in Christ and their spouses hadn't that they should leave them.

The explanation is given in I Corinthians 7 that leaving was wrong. Your marriage is just as valid as ever even though you might have been married in a completely pagan ceremony.

In Thessalonica some Christians stopped working and lived off the generosity of others. They said we're not of this world so we don't have to work. God's answer? "No problem, if you don't work you don't eat."

The Jews questioned whether they should pay taxes to their Roman occupiers. Jesus said, *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.* Mark 12:17

2. A second observation I'd make is that the New Testament doesn't support slavery or any other social injustice. What it does is deal with the people in the injustice rather than the problem.

3. The main problem with slavery, as well as many other social ills, is it fails to treat people as people.

For instance, sex is a beautiful creation of God designed as the intimate expression of oneness of husband and wife. But pornography, prostitution, and the misuse of sex treats people as objects. They're there to be used and discarded.

The wrongness of slavery isn't the submission. We're all to be submitted to Christ and to one another. The evil of slavery is that it treats people as things rather than individuals made in the image of God.

I honestly believe that if Christianity would have stated out calling for a slave revolt it would have faded out in no time. It would have been looked upon as a misguided social program.

Instead God undermined the very foundation of slavery by stressing the truth of the value of human life.

And what could have never been accomplished through a rebellion or a revolt happened

in 200 years as Christianity spread through the Roman Empire.

Think about these verses. "Slaves, you really are slaves to God so serve God by being Christian in your response to those over you. Be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart."

"Not in all the natural things that we would feel. Anger, bitterness, hatred. But be a sincere Christian in your heart because you're really serving Jesus."

First century Christian slaves had a master in the flesh but they were freer in Jesus Christ than any non slave.

"Your master may be a brute who never acknowledges your good work and always demands more, but God sees. God rewards. As hard as this life might be we'd be fools to draw all of our attention and emphasis to this life when it's short and eternity is way long."

Well what about masters? What about Christian Roman citizens who owned slaves just like everybody else in the neighborhood? What should they do?

Read verse 9

Rather than saying, "This is immoral, let them all go." God says, "You guys are serving God too." Remember this is written to Christians.

"You're serving God and it better show up in the way you treat those slaves. You have a master in heaven and He doesn't abuse you. He doesn't rob you of your dignity and treat you as a piece of property! And remember, He's not partial to anybody."

No slave owning Roman who came to Christ could ever again treat his slaves as property.

It was the Gospel of Jesus Christ that undermined and eroded slavery in the Empire.

What about today?

What I find compelling is that just like William Wilberforce applied Christian principles to the issue of slavery in Britain and God used him, today, Christians around the globe are at the forefront of the fight against human trafficking.

They're not the only ones, but there at the forefront.

Sandy Shepherd is just one example. Christian Solidarity International has been instrumental in freeing thousands of slaves in Sudan. Their stories are heartbreaking

beyond description.

In 1997 Gary Haugen, who helped direct the UN investigation of genocide in Rwanda caught a vision for what was happening. He founded International Justice Mission which is responsible for freeing hundreds of sex slaves in South Asia.

The Church Mission Society first met in 1799 in John Newton's home. Today, over 200 years later it's leading in the fight in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East to set people free.

Child voice International focuses on child soldiers, kidnapped, tortured, and made to fight in Uganda for the Lord's Resistance Army.

The list goes on. Global Angels, Stop the Traffic, World Vision, Invisible Children.

And what's telling to me is when you read about the founding of these organizations most started with one or two people who were confronted with slavery in some personal way and was so moved that they couldn't keep silent.

Gary Haugen who heads up International Justice Mission has an article in Christianity Today Magazine that begins with these words, *Wouldn't it be ironic if Western Christians were more excited about what God did through William Wilberforce to fight slavery in 1807 than about what God wants to do through us to fight slavery in 2007?*

What a tragedy it would be if amidst all the movies and memorials celebrating the life of Wilberforce in 2007, Christians missed out on the chance to actually be Wilberforce in 2007—to be used of God to set slaves free, to bring an end to slavery in this generation, and to bring honor to the mission of Christ in the world.

- I. *Two Hundred Years After William Wilberforce Campaigned To Abolish The Slave Trade Within The British Empire, Slavery Continues.*
- II. *The Bible Undermines Slavery At It's Most Basic Level*
- III. *Men Like Wilberforce Teach Us Invaluable Lessons*

I love this cartoon. This is from Newsweek in response to the "Tomb of Jesus" fiasco. That whole thing was so bogus I can't believe the Discovery Chanel put their name on it.

How about WWWD? What would Wilberforce do?

There are lessons can we learn from Wilberforce and John Newton.

1. We shouldn't be troubled if we're ambivalent about politics. We don't want to get off track serving God and so many of us feel real uneasy about political aspects of issues like slavery.

The answer is going to be a spiritual change but we have the right and freedom to bring our Christian convictions into the political realm. That's something they didn't have in New Testament times.

Remember Wilberforce put his trust in Christ after he was in politics and was going to leave. John Newton challenged him to stay and live out his Christian convictions.

2. We shouldn't worry about diluting our efforts by being concerned about more than one issue at once.

We need to use our precious little time that most of us have wisely, but we can still be aware of needs in missions, sanctity of life issues, the persecuted church, and human trafficking.

Wilberforce and his circle of Christian friends are best known for their anti-slavery work but they also founded the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Church Missionary Society, promoted prison reform, sponsored charity schools, and encouraged George III to enforce laws that helped social issues.

3. Social effectiveness requires moral capital. You hear the pundits talking about politicians spending political capital. That's the influence they have because of their position and successes.

We need to have moral capital. If we're going to try to speak to moral issues we'd better be committed to a personal morality of life. If we're hypocritical in our walk with God or arrogant or obnoxious we've lost the fight before it's begun.

4. We need to remember that social issues can't be separated from the gospel.

If all we did was make someone's life better for a few years and didn't bring them the Good News of eternal life when all is said and done we've cheated them.

In 1813, when the British East India Company's charter came up for renewal Wilberforce wouldn't give in until it was mandated that Christian teachers be sent along to India.

So what can we as Christians, who believe that people are made in the image of God, do?

Here's a beginners guide to abolitionist action.

- a. Make a call. 1-888-428-7581 if you see someone held against their will. That's the Justice Department hot line.
- b. Give a dollar. We've named a number of Christian organizations combating slavery.
- c. Read a book. Pick up a book like "Not For Sale," by David Batstone.
- d. See a movie. *Amazing Grace*
- e. Get involved. Check out opportunities like signing the petition from *the Amazing Change* that's on the table in the foyer.
- f. Say a prayer. God is active in our world! He is Lord.

Sometimes with all the ugliness, child soldiers, child prostitutes, people being abused, used, and exploited evil people seem to have the upper hand.

God has not abdicated His authority over this world and we need to be part of the energizing, mobilizing army of prayers who believe that.

There's a battle going on. But, the battle is the Lord's. The question we all need to ask ourselves is, "Am I with Him?"