

It's a surprising statistic. Researchers estimate that anywhere from 21 to 36 million people all over the world are slaves. While slavery is illegal in every country, many countries are seeing rising numbers of slaves. People are being held against their will. They are likely being forced into work, often for no pay with sometimes just enough food to keep them alive. Real slavery happening around the world means real people are being held captive with nothing they can do about it.

I would imagine freedom is what slaves spend most of their time thinking about. They probably imagine that moment when they finally know true freedom, when they're released. True freedom is what Jesus was talking about in the gospel. But he wasn't talking about being slaves working for a slave boss against their will. He wasn't talking about someone being whisked away to work in a factory for no wages. Tonight we sing that the Savior comes...

### **He comes to release the captives**

Jesus confused the Jews. Each one knew their personal situation as well as the situation of their nation. Their history did have some slavery in it. In Egypt they were held in bondage to work for the Pharaohs. Babylon held them in captivity. Each of these times lasted for decades, even more. But they passed. **"How can you say that we shall be set free?"** It didn't make sense. Freedom wasn't something they were concerned about since they were already free. They could come and go as they wanted. They all had jobs that paid. Life was fine. Their country didn't know slavery anymore. Enough generations had passed that the current generation had never known slavery.

The clarification shows Jesus wasn't talking about a physical slavery or captivity. He's not talking about the slavery we would naturally think about, someone being forced to work for little or no wages against their will. But these Jews still were slaves. So long as they continued living how they were they were slaves. Their natural urges got satisfied in whatever way they wanted. The abilities they had were put to use in despicable ways. Their thoughts were on personal gain or glory. **"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."** Jesus brings out a hard truth. Reality is harsher. Unchecked sin is really slavery. They were slaves, doing what their sinful natures wanted, and following Satan who tempted them into sin. They were slaves to sin.

"But I can stop anytime I want." "I don't have to do those things they just feel good." "I didn't want to but the group was all doing it so I went along." Any of those sound familiar? They're the statements of someone who has base urges for pleasure and gives in. What is really in control when we give in to the pleasure-seeking of the moment with no regard for what it will mean tomorrow or our future? If I can't control myself eating tasty foods, how will I ever gain control when faced with temptations to give in with a boyfriend or girlfriend? If it feels good do it is the argument of the world. If that argument is used to justify stealing or greed, aren't I under the control of those feelings or even under the control of the world? When the group leads me into wrong doing, criminal behavior, or simply encourages instead of discourages these things haven't I lost all control? This is slavery. It's all slavery. It's a spiritual slavery to our sin.

By the very nature of slavery, slaves have no control and no rights. People who willingly give in to sin, go along to get along, or choose to keep sinning because it feels right or good, have lost their rights. Jesus says about them, **"Now a slave has no permanent place in the family."** Slaves to sin aren't part of God's family. They are excluded, cut off, and will be cast into hell.

Jesus spoke the truth, and about the truth. **"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."** Teachings, truth, being disciples, these all come from Jesus and focus on one thing. What teaching about Jesus is most important? What teaching is a truth above all others? What teaching has the power and ability to set people free from spiritual slavery to sin? Jesus pointed out what people like you and I need. We need someone who isn't a slave to sin to step in for us and free us. The truth that's most important is Jesus is our Savior.

Jesus was born under the law to keep the law. But he wasn't a slave to the law. He was no slave to sin. He mastered every human desire. He always made decisions in line with God's will perfectly. The pressure of the group never got to him. Jesus was perfect and without sin in any way. Because he wasn't a slave to sin, when he went to his death on the cross he sacrificed himself for people who were slaves to sin. Jesus gave himself for you and me. The truth is that Jesus is the Savior who burst the gates of brass, as the hymn we just sang says. These were the gates that held us captive to sin. He forced them open in victory. The irons that held us as slaves in our sin fell away. Jesus came to release those held captive by sin.

Slaves to sin have a great danger of falling back into slavery. But those connected to the Son aren't slaves to sin. **"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."** Those set free by the Son of God are not only free, they're part of the family. You're part of God's family because of the Son. He has set you free so you go from slave to sin to child of God. That comes with rights and privileges. It comes with love and caring. It comes with God's presence and eternal life. Child of God, you belong to God's family forever. You who once were a captive to sin are now free indeed. Hark the glad sound! The Savior comes to release those held captive in their sinfulness so they might be free. That is what you are now in Christ.