
Freedom Sunday

Will You Take a Stand?

It is so hard to get our heads around the figure that today – over 40 million children, women and men around the world are exploited in coercive labour and trapped in slavery!

You might ask – why? How is this possible in today's society? Put simply criminals prey on the poorest and most vulnerable because the perpetrators expect no one to come for or defend them. Human trafficking generates about \$150 billion a year—two-thirds from commercial sexual exploitation. (*International Labour Organisation*)

International Justice Mission (IJM), the largest international anti-slavery organisation in the world, leads a global effort to rescue victims, bring perpetrators to justice, provide restoration and rehabilitation after care for survivors, strengthen justice systems and law enforcement agencies and to activate comprehensive support and protection systems around the world.

Three Types of Suffering

- + **God, are you there, do you care?** Matthew 11:23 – When things don't make sense!
- + **God, is there a plan, this is urgent?** Mark 5: 21-43 – Acute, chronic and vicarious trauma
- + **God, did we not do as you asked?** Acts 16:13-40 – The consequences of evoking social and societal change!

Kingdom Aspirations

To truly liberate the captives takes more than a personal individual encounter with God – it takes confrontation of the systems, structures and powers benefiting from the injustices. If we, His Church, are true to the Gospel, then we cannot stay silent where unjust social and spiritual structures exist that exploit the poor and vulnerable.

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Ephesians 6:12 (NIV)

Yes, it is true that 'the devil's schemes' refers to more than matters of injustice, slavery, and violence against those who are poor. Absolutely. But we also know, right from the start, from Eden itself, the devil has been out to destroy men, women and children created in the image of God.

If people won't destroy themselves, the evil one will use others. Could there be a more horrific example of the devil's schemes than a \$150bn industry designed to destroy the lives of others?

Solution: God wants His people to STAND!

God is calling us into this battle. God, the God of Justice, is calling you, us, His Church, to stand up for the helpless, to take the lead in ending slavery. To speak up for those whose voice cannot be heard.

But this is not new: God has always called His people to stand up for the cause of the poor, the widow, the fatherless and the oppressed! Just take a look at His word.

- + Isaiah 58-59
- + Isaiah 1:23-25
- + Proverbs 14:31; Proverbs 19:17
- + Proverbs 31:8-9
- + Zechariah 7:9-10
- + Matthew 25
- + Acts 15
- + James 2:8; 14-17
- + 1 John 3:17-18

But if we're going to step into the battle, we're going to need protection. God's armour. His complete provision for all we're called to do in this fight - Ephesians 6:13-17.

So, how do we know we're supposed to use the armour of God in the battle against slavery? We know it because God tells us to. Because that's what He Himself does.

Back in Isaiah's day, the people of Israel thought it was okay to bring amazing worship, but at the same time to ignore the plight of the widows, fatherless, and the oppressed.

How could it happen? That God's people - who should be known for their justice, their mercy, their humble walk, just let injustice and violence rule their streets? When our Lord sees this - how does He respond?

What Isaiah says next is some of the strongest language we ever read about God:

"Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey. The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, He was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so His own arm achieved salvation for Him, and His own righteousness sustained Him. He put on righteousness as His breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; He put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped Himself in zeal as in a cloak." Isaiah 59:15-17 (NIV)

God says... "I am so appalled that my people are doing nothing about injustice, I'm going to put this armour on myself."

Remember, Paul was a renowned Pharisee. There's little doubt he would have had the gross injustices of Isaiah 59 running through his mind as he wrote about the armour of God in Ephesians 6. We, His Church today, are called to imitate God, and take a stand against injustice as we wear God's armour.

Good thing: We'll never stand in our own strength. We'll never win our own victory: we battle in the power and protection of Jesus, who in His cross and resurrection has already won the decisive victory - Ephesians 1:19-21.

As we engage in the battle to free those who are captives, as we meet the waves of injustice, as we seek to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one's destruction, God says to us:

"Put on my armour, Church!" And stand. Stand in Jesus' resurrection power, stand. And fight. Fight against injustice. Fight for justice for the poor, oppressed, vulnerable and exploited. And in Him, one Church united, we'll stand in victory.

And, friends, it's going to take an army, a movement of churches, all clothed in God's armour, to end slavery and everyday violence against those who are poor. **Will you stand?**

Almighty God, who created us in your own image: Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use our freedom, help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice in our communities and among the nations, to the glory of your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Ways to Stand!

1. **Want to know more about the work of IJM?** Visit the IJM website - [IJM.org.au](http://ijm.org.au)
2. **Become a FREEDOM PARTNER today!** \$31 per month or more as nominated by you – enables IJM to know their operating budget and continue their rescue and restoration, system strengthening and prosecution work! As a Freedom Partner, you will receive regular emails with prayer points from the field, testimonies of rescue and breakthrough, and the assurance you are on the frontline!
3. **The Children in the Pictures – 25 September, 3.30pm Dendy Cinema Coorparoo.** IJM Australia is the charity partner for the advanced screening of *The Children in the Pictures*. A compelling, disturbing, but very, very necessary documentary film to raise awareness of this transnational crime - the 'online sexual exploitation of children' (OSEC).

By attending or inviting others to this special screening event that includes a 25-minute Q&A with IJM Staff, you are choosing to join the fight to end slavery and violence.

To secure tickets: <https://events.humanitix.com/tcitp-dendy-coorparoo-ijm>.

4. **Go Deeper.** To hear more IJM stories from the field, head on to Riverlife's podcast *Going Deeper* to access a number of interviews we have had the privilege to record over the past three years. You can also find the links in our recent posts on our Social Media pages.

If you want to further understand the complexity of these issues – you can read *The Locus Effect: Why the End of Poverty Requires the End of Violence* by Gary Haugen. <https://www.thelocusteffect.com/>

#UntilAllAreFree