

## Notes for Sermon on Modern Slavery Given by Prof. Kevin Bales

Advent Sunday, 1 December 2019

### Some facts about modern slavery:

Modern Slavery exists in every nation on earth, and it is real slavery, the control of people, as if they were objects, for the purposes of exploitation – it's not legal in most places, but that doesn't change its nature.

### It includes

- Forced labour,
- Forced commercial sexual exploitation,
- Bonded labour – for example through false debt.
- Criminal exploitation – for instance forced begging, or supplying drugs
- Enslaved as domestic servants
- And there are still millions caught in Hereditary slavery

Slavery is in many industries: agriculture, fishing, manufacturing, construction, and hospitality. Any business where labour is intensive and profits are low.

Does this sound like something that is close or far away? In a public awareness survey, about 70% of the population of the UK say they think modern slavery is a global problem, but only about 5% think it's a problem where they live.

But there are cases in English cities and villages and out on the farms - in the UK almost 7,000 people were identified as likely victims last year, we think the true number is around 13,000.

And this is not just about migrants. **British citizens** were the single largest nationality amongst victims identified last year.

Migrants are certainly vulnerable to exploitation. But in the UK people who are homeless, or who have addictions, are being enslaved and exploited. Young people and those with learning disabilities have been affected. Vulnerable people have been recruited into labour exploitation from food banks, night shelters and soup runs. Sometimes even from churches.

And just as in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, slavery is built into the fabric of our society. From cheap car washes and nail bars, to takeaway food, fast fashion, and conflict minerals in our mobile phone and computers.

We're all close to this problem.

Now...

You don't have to be a theologian to recognise that from a Christian – or indeed just a human – perspective that modern slavery is a crime.

When we look to the Bible it is clear that freedom is a gift from God to humanity, and that God is deeply offended by those who perpetuate injustice.

**In fact, Freedom is a defining mark of God's people.** Israel's escape from Egypt is **the** pivotal moment of the old testament, and becomes a point returned to again and again as a mark of God's faithfulness to Israel and their lasting relationship with him.

- Remember Exodus 13:3 'Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.'

Freedom is a **touchstone**: a marker of God's presence and promise to his people.

However, if we look more deeply, God gives clear instruction in the laws of justice, that no one should be ill-treated:

Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt – it says in Exodus 23:9

God is also deeply offended by leaders who build luxury and wealth on the backs of others: a key repeated theme in **Isaiah**. **And Isaiah** is clear there will be judgement for people who live in luxury founded on injustice.

And as he always does, **Jesus** shakes things up further. Freedom and a gospel for the poor is core to his mission, listen as he takes on the prophesy of Isaiah in Luke 4:18:

'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**'.

In the new testament, slavery is a metaphor of slavery used to point out our bondage to the law, to sin, and to death, before Christ's sacrifice. The sacrifice that leads to **Freedom** and the restoration of human value.

- '**You are no longer a slave**, but God's child, and since you are his child, you are also an heir.' It says in Galatians 4:7:

The New Testament subverts the legal and social conventions to show that all are equal before God:

- There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (again in Galatians)

Now the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, was written over the centuries when slavery was **normal, legal, and regularly justified** – but though it was **of** that time the Word repeats three key principles:

- Firstly, That **God desires us to be free**, in relationship with him, and **liberty is a marker of his people**.
- Secondly, that **we are to challenge injustice**. We must not knowingly live in wealth and luxury that is founded on the labour of the poorest – or support rulers who turn a blind eye to the oppression of the poor and vulnerable.
- Thirdly, In **Christ we are equal** and **we should not promote economic and social practices that perpetuate inequality and injustice**.

**Like so many of the teachings of Jesus, these principles challenge us when we come to know about slavery today.**

When we know that abuse and injustice is feeding our society's appetite for cheap goods and services, when it is clear even our purchases might be in conflict with God's plan for us, with his expectations of us, his people. We have to find a way forward, but how?

**How can we attempt to address something so big that it goes to the heart of our economy, our practices, our perceptions of our place in the world?**

Perhaps we need to be like salt and light.

**A little salt goes a long way to change the flavour of something**

- Our church is small but it can challenge society and bring its prophetic voice to this issue.
- But to begin that we need to repent. We have to pray for forgiveness for our society, and for reform of the systems that perpetuate injustice.
- And One place to start is recognising that some goods are cheap for a reason, then looking for **fairtrade** goods and other quality marks that help to prevent exploitation.
- In the UK the Church of England has developed the safe car wash app, to help people recognise hand car washes that are higher risk for exploitation, from a simple set of questions. It's been amazing, not just as a tool to map and report those businesses, but to generally raise awareness.

- Think too about governance. In Guernsey there is a LACK of policies, a hole in our laws, that increases people's vulnerability to exploitation, Could we challenge the States to put human rights above the protection of labour contracts?

You know, salt's both a disinfectant and an irritant – have you ever got salt in a wound? Perhaps as people of faith we should be open to being a little more irritating on this issue.

**AND What about letting our light shine? After all – here we are in the Advent season – waiting for the light to shine onto us, but also out from us.**

Light helps people to see, and we can shine a light on problem.

- The church is a great convenor. It has rooms and buildings and influence to bring people together at community level. **And there are many faith actors already working on this issue.**
- And we don't just need a diffuse and general light, we need targeted spotlights. My guess is that in Guernsey, the spotlight needs to shine on two points – firstly awareness, basic truths about slavery; and secondly on how we can LITERALLY free people in slavery – through joining to together in the One Island/One Village Campaign – a campaign that helps a village caught in hereditary slavery to transform into a community in freedom.
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- Light also helps us to see further. Do you have a big vision? STORY ABOUT Ramphal?
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Modern Slavery and Human trafficking is a darkness that covers the earth. But light – even a little light – casts out darkness. If we join our lights together, as individuals, and as a global church, then with God's help and grace - we can chase this shadow back, perhaps even give our world and our children the most amazing gift – after ten thousand years of slavery – after untold millions have suffered in bondage – we can give our children and our planet **the gift of a world without slavery**. We actually know how much that would cost (about the price of a new aircraft carrier) and how long it would take (about 20 years) – it's actually within our grasp – that together with Isaiah – we could:

say to the captives, '**Come out,**' and to those in darkness, '**Be free!**' <sup>[1]</sup> <sub>[SEP]</sub>