**Paying the Ransom of Debt Slavery**

According to Anti-Slavery International, bonded labor, or debt bondage is the leading form of slavery in the modern world. The practice was outlawed in most civilized countries in the late 1800’s as a form of slavery. Debt bondage is prevalent in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, with the victims working in brick kilns, rice harvesting, fisheries, domestic labor and prostitution. The families trapped in these arrangements are powerless and, in many cases, are defrauded into perpetual slavery.

People who abuse their fellowman will one day be held accountable by their Creator, but that is not the main focus of my thoughts today. The sad fact is that debt slavery offers possibly the best analogy to the spiritual slavery that engulfs the majority of mankind.

The apostle Paul points out in Romans chapter 6 that there are only two options for any person. I am either a slave to unrighteousness or I am a slave to righteousness. There is no “door number three”. Joshua understood the concept. He told the Israelites that they had a choice to make: While they were at liberty to choose to serve the false gods of their fathers, Joshua said, “As for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah.” (Joshua 24:15)

This choice has profound consequences. Paul said that slavery to sin brings only one outcome: death. Slavery to righteousness brings sanctification and eternal life (Romans 6:21-22). But Romans 6 is written under the assumption that we are at liberty to walk away from the slavery of sin and change our allegiance. There is only one problem: In rebelling against a just and righteous Creator, we have incurred a debt that Jesus compared to thousands of lifetimes of labor (Matthew 18:24). Unless someone was both willing and able to pay the ransom, Satan would have every one of us trapped in eternal slavery; Debt Slavery.

The beauty of the gospel message is that God loved us enough to provide His own perfect sacrifice, His own Son, to shed His blood on a Roman cross to redeem us, to pay the ransom for our sins so that He could forgive us and still remain just (Romans 3:23-26). But despite the sacrifice of Jesus, not all men will escape the destructive slavery of this world. Every accountable person has sinned against God (Romans 3:23) and without the death of Christ, all men would be without hope. But because Jesus paid the ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:6), each of us is at liberty to choose service to God who loves us instead of service to the one bent on destroying us.

In Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), He describes a young man who had wasted his inheritance with “loose living”. When he hit rock bottom, he resolved to return to his father’s house and ask simply to work as one of the hired servants. As He tells the story, Jesus grants us a glimpse into the love of the Father. As a person approaches God intending to submit as a slave as Paul describes, God, instead, runs down the road to meet him, puts a robe on him and a ring on his finger and prepares the fatted calf. While we deserve nothing, God welcomes us into the family as sons and daughters.

Spiritual debt slavery is eternally devastating and Jesus loved us enough to die a torturous death to pay the ransom to secure our freedom. Each of us must resolve not to squander it.

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