

YOU ARE NOT YOUR OWN  
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Travelers to 1870's Zanzibar, an island off the coast of East Africa, often commented on the large number of white seashells glistening under the clear waters of the bay. The gruesome truth was far less charming, as they were not shells at all, but the bones of dead slaves tossed overboard—a grim token of the 20,000 stolen men who, each year, passed through Zanzibar, the largest slave market in the world.

Perhaps the most successful of all slavers was an Arab named Hamed bin Muhammed, known widely as “Tippu Tib,” a name meant to imitate the sound of rifles he used to destroy and enslave so many on the Dark Continent. As he would say, “the gun is king of Africa.” A fascinating chapter on Tippu Tib's rise to prominence is in the book, *Tales of the African Frontier*, by J.A. Hunter and Daniel P. Mannix.

Tippu Tib perfected a strategy that could be repeated time and again which brought him fabulous wealth, power and respect, and struck terror in the hearts of those who found themselves staring into his muskets. He would travel to the interior, collecting ivory. Then he would overpower an entire village at gunpoint, enslave its citizens, force them to carry the ivory back to Zanzibar, and sell both ivory and his new found slaves for a king's ransom. Tippu Tib also used inter-tribal warfare to further his fortune. He would form an alliance with a certain tribe and, together, they would wipe out the tribe's enemy, survivors of which would be sold into slavery. Then, when the friendly tribe grew boastful of its victories and began to demand tribute from Tippu Tib's caravan, that tribe also would be captured and marched off to Zanzibar, a deadly journey with a mortality rate estimated by Livingstone at 80%. If four out of five died, that was an acceptable loss because the remaining 20% were still enough to keep the industry booming. As one British official stated, “The Arabs regard it like transporting ice. You know most of it will melt away, but there'll be enough left to show a profit.”

Slavery was abolished in Zanzibar in 1897, but Tippu Tib's house still stands there, a reminder of a bygone era when man-stealing raked in serious profits. It was a frightful time when you could be minding your own business and find yourself suddenly torn from family and home and marched at gunpoint to be bought and paid for by a stranger who now owned you as private property—lock, stock and barrel.

Macabre memories, to be sure. But, evil as that practice was, it pales in comparison with modern spiritual slavery. “Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (Rom. 6:16, ESV). When you violate God's law you are “sold under sin” (Rom. 7:14). In essence, you stand exposed and helpless on the auction block and Satan enters the winning bid. He owns you. The other end of the chain around your neck is in the fingers of the prince of darkness. As long as the devil is your master, you are powerless to be righteous. Paul said, “For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness” (Rom. 6:20). In that hopeless situation you would live and die, having been captured by the devil's wiles, torn from fellowship with God and dragged dangerously distant from the innocence of childhood—doomed to live forever in hell (Rev. 20:15).

You will never cease to be a slave. But, unlike Tippu Tib's prisoners, you can choose who buys you off the auction block. When you are baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27), you are purchased at the price of divine blood (Acts 20:28). Paul wrote, “Or do you not know that your body is a

temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19,20).

God’s slaves are volunteers. They are bought, but not stolen. They are owned, but not abused. They are required to labor hard, but helped along the way. They are marched on a route fraught with danger, but which—if survived—leads to the gates of heaven. “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life” (Rom. 6:22). So, whose slave will you be?