

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
May 14 & 15, 2016  
Sean Litton—International Justice Mission President  
Justice Weekend | 1 Samuel 14**

Good morning! I'm Sean Litton. I'm the President of International Justice Mission and it's wonderful to be with you today. I've been working with IJM for sixteen years and I heard about this church many years ago. There was a group of people from this church that took IJM to Kampala, Uganda and they helped us set up an office there to help widows and orphans who had been thrown off their land after the death of the husband and father. That land is their only source of support, the only shelter they have, the only means to grow food and eat, so these widows and orphans are left completely destitute. Through some lawyers in this church, and other people that came around us, we were able to bring assistance to them. You helped us again as we took this work to Zambia. Because of you, over 2,800 widows and orphans have been restored to their homes and their lands over the last ten or so years.

Even more significant are the changes that are happening in those justice systems that are preventing more widows and orphans from ever experiencing that kind of deprivation. And this weekend, I am here, but this is part of a larger citywide justice weekend. Almost 30,000 people this week are going to be hearing messages similar to what I'm about to share with you. Through the leadership of your church and a few other churches, twelve different churches are mobilizing around justice and God's heart for justice this weekend. There's going to be a concert tonight as you heard, and I hope that you'll come. I'll be there . . . I'm not singing, but I will listen to the music! We're just hoping that out of the Twin Cities, God will move, and as He moves, His justice will go forth. I'm really happy to be with you.

This morning I would like to talk about phrases and words that are very familiar. Sometimes things that we say can become so familiar to us, so routine and automatic, that we just don't even pay attention to what we're saying. The words lose their meaning and it's just an automatic saying. When I was a sophomore in high school—I was very young for my class, I think I was fourteen-and-a-half or fifteen—our school had a dance every year where the women invited the boys. We called it Twerp. It stands for The Woman is Required to Pay; also called Sadie Hawkins in other places. So, I'm a sophomore in high school and I had never had a girlfriend. I lived out in the country and a girl who was a junior, Alicia Lang, asked me to go to the dance with her. Now, Alicia Lang is a full grown woman and she asked me to go to the dance, and I said yes. So the Saturday of the dance, Alicia Lang gets in her Buick—this is around 1984—drives out to Aida, Michigan, the little township I lived in, drives down our driveway, parks the car, and comes to the door. My parents greet her, walk her down to the kitchen where I'm waiting (in a suit that my parents had bought me for the dance) and she pins a boutonniere on me. I put my corsage on her wrist, and she takes me out to her car, drives me to a restaurant, takes me to dinner . . . Many of you women are associating

this experience with me, but she takes me to the dance and we have a nice time. On the way home, she took us on a long drive through the country, and I'm nervous. Eventually she pulls down our long driveway, parks the car, gets out, comes around, opens my side of the door, takes me out of the car . . . I can't believe this is true, but it's true . . . and walks me to my front door. I'm terrified, so I step up on the front step and I look her right in the eye and she kisses me good night. It was very sweet, and then I said what we say every night in the Litton family when we go to bed: "Good night. Love you." After I said it I realized it was a mistake, but it was too late—she was walking away from me as I said it, and she turned around and she said, "I love you, too." And so I entered into my first serious romantic relationship by mistake at the age of fourteen. It lasted three months until I could get out of it. That's all true.

For me, this sort of automatic, almost somewhat thoughtless expression is not limited to awkward fourteen or fifteen-year-old romantic relationships. I find these familiar sayings even in my relationship with God. I say things and I pray things without really thinking about what I'm saying, without complete awareness of the full implication of the words. Consider this word: kingdom. John Ortberg defines your kingdom as the range of your effective will. This is your domain, where what you say goes. Where things are actually the way that you want them to be, starting with your own physical body and working outward from there—your car, your home, your office, your bank accounts, your investment and retirement accounts, your time, your gifts, all your assets—everywhere that your will reigns supreme. We all have our own personal kingdom. Some are bigger than others, but we all have one, and it's a great source of comfort and security. It's the range of our effective will.

Now, Ortberg also talks about the Kingdom of God. The range of God's effective will, where His will reigns, where things actually are the way that God wants them to be. Where children are not sold for sex, where little girls are safe, where widows and orphans are protected, where everyone has enough to eat, where the broken are healed, where the meek and the humble are exalted, where the marginalized and the rejected are welcomed and seated at the place of honor. This is the Kingdom of God. This is what it looks like when God's will actually reigns on earth. Now, consider this most familiar prayer, *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* I grew up in a church very similar to this church and I've been praying this prayer my entire life. And when I pray *Thy kingdom come* I mean it. Lord, let Your kingdom come here on earth, take away the pain, and the sorrow, and the destruction, and the war and the grief, and let Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. I don't think I fully grasp the full implication of what I'm praying. See, when you ask for God's Kingdom to come on earth and for the range of His will to expand, there are significant implications for your own personal kingdom. You can't ask for the effective range of God's will to govern on earth without simultaneously yielding the effective range of your own will. You can't build the Kingdom of God without putting your own personal kingdoms at risk. It's a hard truth, but it is true. There's always an element of risk, an element of vulnerability involved, and I want to share an illustration of this with you this morning. It's from 1 Samuel 14. If you have your Bibles, please turn there.

1 Samuel 14 takes place in the Kingdom of Israel. Saul has been made king and the Kingdom of Israel is literally . . . think of it as God’s Kingdom. So Saul has been made king, and he has called for the warriors of Israel to free Israel from Philistine oppression. This is not the David and Goliath story; this is before David and Goliath. And in response to this, the Philistines gather their entire host. It’s a vast host—soldiers as numerous as there are grains of sand on the seashore, three thousand chariots—and when the Israelite soldiers see this massive host facing them, they begin to run away. Some hide in wells, some hide in caves, many switch sides to join the Philistines. See, this is actually a reasonable response to something that’s not immediately clear in the story: under Philistine rule in Israel, there were no blacksmiths allowed and no weapons, so that the army of Israel had just two swords, that was it. One is held by Saul and one is held by his son Jonathan, who shows up later in the story. So, as the Israelite army melts away, we find Saul who is now down to six hundred men. They’re camped under a pomegranate tree. They refused to leave and they are just sitting there under the tree. While they’re sitting there, the Philistines turn loose three raiding parties on the undefended villages and settlements of Israel where all the wives and children of these men are. It’s easy to pass over that, but what does that really mean? It means that while Saul and those six hundred men sit under the tree, the Philistines are assaulting their wives and daughters, taking their children off into slavery, destroying their crops and their homes, and murdering anyone who stands in their way. It’s horror. All hell has broken loose in the Kingdom of God.

But here’s King Saul under the pomegranate tree with his six hundred men and two swords. He does nothing. The Kingdom of God is being destroyed and the king does nothing. Well, Saul is up against impossible odds. What can six hundred men and two swords do versus three thousand chariots and so many soldiers? Survival is doubtful, victory is impossible, and so Saul does what most people do in a situation like this, they try to hold on to the little piece of their kingdom they have left, and he sits under the pomegranate tree. But listen to what his son Jonathon does. I’m going to start reading in verse 6 of chapter 14.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, “Come, let’s go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised men. Perhaps the LORD will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few.” <sup>7</sup> “Do all that you have in mind,” his armor-bearer said. “Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul.”

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan said, “Come on, then; we will cross over toward them and let them see us. <sup>9</sup> If they say to us, ‘Wait there until we come to you,’ we will stay where we are and not go up to them. <sup>10</sup> But if they say, ‘Come up to us,’ we will climb up, because that will be our sign that the LORD has given them into our hands.”

<sup>11</sup> So both of them showed themselves to the Philistine outpost. “Look!” said the Philistines. “The Hebrews are crawling out of the holes they were hiding in.”

<sup>12</sup> The men of the outpost shouted to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, “Come up to us and we’ll teach you a lesson.” So Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, “Climb up after me; the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel.” <sup>13</sup> Jonathan

climbed up, using his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer right behind him. The Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer followed and killed behind him. <sup>14</sup> In that first attack Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed some twenty men in an area of about half an acre. [1 Samuel 14:6-14]

And this is just the beginning. As soon as this attack is done, there is an earthquake and the Philistine Army is thrown into total panic and confusion; they actually begin attacking one another. As Saul sees this from a distance and understands what's happening, he calls the army of Israel to him. All those men who went and hid in the holes, and in the caves, and in the wells—all those men who switched over to the other side—returned to Saul's banner. They engaged the Philistines, and in a single day they drive the Philistines out of the nation of Israel. They defeat the entire Philistine army in one day. One day. The whole world is turned upside down and the power of the oppressor is broken. The impossible becomes possible. There's a new reality that better reflects the goodness and the righteousness of God. This is the Kingdom of God breaking forth on the earth. How did it happen? Started with one person. Just one. One individual human being who said, "Perhaps. Perhaps God will act." He refused to accept the slaughter of the people of God. He became vulnerable. He put his entire personal kingdom at risk so that God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. *Perhaps, perhaps the Lord will act on our behalf.* Nothing, nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.

I love this story. I love it. Always have loved it. First time I read it, I loved it. I love it because of this—that word "perhaps". Jonathan did not know what was going to happen when he went to engage that outpost. We are reading the story and we know the ending, but he didn't know, and he said perhaps it was real. He was looking up a cliff at twenty men, but he took that first step forward. He saw something that was completely wrong and he refused to accept it. He set aside his own comfort and his own security, and he took action. And through him, through one individual and his faithful friend, God rescued the entire nation of Israel. It all started with perhaps.

Jonathan's perhaps is not a unique story. You see the same thing repeated just a few chapters later in David and Goliath and again and again throughout human history. In fact, if you think about it in human history, every time a great evil is overcome, you will find individual men and women who refuse to accept the status quo and who set aside their own comfort and security, become vulnerable, and risk everything. Risk everything to make it right.

Sixteen years ago I was working as a lawyer in Washington, DC. I had just finished a big trial in California representing Toyota Motor Company in an automotive commission's lawsuit. It was incredibly exciting. Hydrocarbons, onboard diagnostics, algorithms, you name it. Spent several months in California, came back to Washington,

D.C., went to church on a Sunday, just like you are all here today, and here is a member from our church preaching. His name is Gary Haugen. He had just left the Department of Justice to start International Justice Mission and he tells the story of a girl named Jotee. Jotee is a fifteen-year-old girl in India. She is in a train station on her way to visit family, and two women befriend her. They offer her tea, and she accepts. The tea is drugged, she falls unconscious, the women move her on to the train and take her across India to the city of Mumbai where they sell her to a brothel. And when Jotee comes to, she is told *you're now going to work as a prostitute, we own you in our brothel*. Initially she refuses, but they beat her, they starve her, and she eventually submits. And one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten times a day she has to submit to horrible things. This is all against the law, but the people that are supposed to protect Jotee are walking right by and watching it happen because they're accepting money from the brothels. And this girl has no hope and I'm sitting here thinking about this and I'm thinking about this girl and then I'm hearing that there are millions of girls like this, and millions, and millions, and millions of other people held in slavery. More people held in slavery right now than in any time in human history. And I'm thinking about this girl; I'm thinking about her life being devoured and destroyed just one bite at a time, one piece at a time, and literally no one is coming to save her. IJM found her; one of the very first cases IJM ever did. They found her, they somehow mobilized the police to do an operation and rescue her, and then they came alongside her to help her recover. Gary told this story and then he shared some scripture from Isaiah:

Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. [Isaiah 1:17]

And then from Micah:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.  
[Micah 6:8]

I sang that song every week at my college fellowship. It never actually occurred to me to go out and do justice. Bible studies? Yes. Justice? Gary's message: the world is full of injustice. God hates it. He wants it to stop and we, the Church, His body, we are His plan to stop it. And I sat there and in my mind I thought of a girl trapped in a brothel and I thought, *oh, what would it take to help that girl?* And then that night I went home and I wrote a letter and I applied for a job at International Justice Mission because they couldn't find any lawyers who would go overseas. I was actually the only one who applied for the job. It's a good way to get a job. And they gave me the job and they gave me a half a day of training, they gave me a laptop computer, and a little piece of paper, a mission memo that said, "Your job is to interview any cases of injustice where the local authorities cannot be relied upon for relief. Good luck."

And so I went to Manila, Philippines, a city of nine million people. My first trip to Asia. And I began by meeting with Christian ministries that worked with the poor. I walked into one shelter for girls run by a local church and they had about thirty girls there. All had been sexually assaulted, none who had ever seen justice. All of them terribly victimized, no one had ever done anything about it, and so I said, "Can you show me one case?" And they gave me a file of a young girl named Katherine Undalas who, when she was thirteen, had come to Manila to live with her aunt who put her to work in her house as a servant. And it turned out, her aunt was a drug addict and she had a boyfriend who was also a drug addict. A 23-year-old named Marlin Abrego. And Marlin Abrego's father was a powerful local police officer. So this thirteen-year-old girl, separated from her parents, is in this house with these drug addicts, and these parties, and all this chaos. And one night Marlin Abrego sends everybody out of the house and he violently assaults Katherine. And he tells her he'll kill her if she ever tells anybody. Eventually he disappears, a couple of months go by, she tells her aunt what happened, and what she's saying is "I'm not a rag. I'm not a rag you can wipe your filth on and just throw it away in the corner." She knows something. So she goes to her aunt, goes to the police and swears out a complaint. She submits to a physical examination, goes before the prosecutor, tells her story again, and the prosecutor recommends to the judge that the case go to trial. The judge agrees and issues a warrant for Marlin Abrego's arrest to be brought before the court for the trial, for the rape of a thirteen-year-old, Katherine Undalas, and the warrant goes to the police office where his father works, and nothing happens. Nothing. And one year goes by, and two years go by, and Katherine's aunt disappears and Katherine ends up basically an orphan in a shelter and that's where I found her, so I asked if I could meet her. She came downstairs and I said, "Katherine, (I explained why I was here), I'd love to help you. I don't know if I can help you. Do you still want to pursue this case?" She said, "Opo", which means "yes, sir" in Philippine. "Okay, Katherine you're going to have to testify in court. You're going to have to confront Marlin Abrego. Are you sure you want to pursue this case?" "Opo." Yes, sir. "Okay, Katherine. I really don't know what's going to happen, but I want you to know I'm going to do everything I can for you, and I want you to know something else, God loves you. He loves you. I know He loves you because He sent me here to help you." So again, I don't know anything about what I'm doing, let's be clear, and I have to find Marlin Abrego in a city of nine million. But, we get a copy of Air Supply's Greatest Hits. Some of you are familiar with this group, big in the 70s, they're still big in the Philippines, and we use that CD to trick Marlin Abrego's mother into telling us where he's hiding, and we find him. And then a General I met at a prayer breakfast, I give him the warrant, I give him a map of Abrego's location, and he has Abrego arrested, he's brought before the court, and we go to trial. I work with the prosecutor and Katherine gives a phenomenal testimony, we find the aunt, she cooperates through most of the story, we find the doctor that examined Katherine, the psychologist that talked to her, and we put on a fantastic case. And then the defense comes up and Abrego has a good lawyer and he puts on about seven witnesses who all say, "Yes, Katherine was living with her aunt, yes Katherine was assaulted, but it wasn't Marlin Abrego." We don't have

any DNA evidence. All we have to identify him as the attacker is Katherine's testimony. It wasn't Abrego; it was her uncle. The reason she's blaming Abrego is because of the shame of the family and that this happened within their family, and this is all completely and totally believable and the witnesses are incredibly convincing and consistent.

And I'm sitting there, you know, the Christian who came to do justice thinking *oh no, what if I've got the wrong person? What if because of her shame Katherine has misled us?* And so we decide we have to find the uncle. Well, he's on one of the ninety-some islands of the Philippines and I find a pastor who lives on the same island. He finds the uncle, sets up a meeting with him, and I get on a plane to go meet this uncle who may be the one who assaulted Katherine. Pastor picks me up from the airport and I arrange for the meeting to be in a big open park because I'm actually afraid; I don't know what's going to happen. And there I find the uncle, he's about 50-years-old, and his giant, strapping son waiting for me. Unfortunately the pastor was a small pastor. We sit down and I begin to ask him questions. Highly skilled, highly trained Washington, D.C. lawyer, this shouldn't be a problem. "The crime occurred the summer of 1998. Sir, do you know where you were in the summer of 1998?" "No." "Okay, let's walk backward. Do you remember where you were Christmas of this year?" "No." "Could you remember, how about the year 2000, do you remember anything in that year?" "No." "Do you remember 1999?" "No." "Do you remember anything?" "No." This is impossible that he can't remember anything so I'm like *hmmm*. "Well, of course you have papers. What do you do?" Well, he works for a shipping company so he goes out for like nine months at a time on these ships and then he comes back to the Philippines. "Does your shipping company have records of your work?" And he says, "Absolutely." "And you have a passport, right, and it gets stamped when you leave the country?" "Yes." "Great. Where are those documents?" "Well, they're with the shipping company in Manila." "Great. I live in Manila. Can I get access to those documents?" "No, no you can't, I'm sorry, that's impossible." And I'm like *oh my goodness, oh my goodness, we have the wrong . . .* I don't know what's going on and I can't figure out what to do. I'm totally overwhelmed and so I shut the interview down and I turn to the pastor and say, "Hey, let's go." And he says, "We really need to give these two people a ride home." So we walk over to the pickup truck and they have to ride in the back of the pickup truck and I don't want to be rude, so I get in the back of pickup truck and I'm riding in the back with the uncle and his big son and we're flying down the road about forty miles an hour. And the uncle says to me in the back of this pickup truck, "Have you ever been to Baltimore? The Port of Baltimore." "Um, yes, Baltimore is right near Washington, D.C. Yeah, I've been there" "Have you ever been to the Siemens Chapel there?" I'm like, "No, I've never been to the Siemens Chapel in Baltimore." "Have you ever met the Chaplin from the Siemens Chapel?" "No, haven't met him, no." He says, "Well, I have his card" and I say, "That's great" and he reaches behind him and he says, "I have his card" and he wants to show me the Chaplin's card. And as he pulls out the card from his wallet this piece of paper blows out of his wallet. Blows out of his wallet in the back of this pickup truck flying down the road, it starts swirling around the bed of the pickup truck and I quickly grab it

because I think it must be important and I reach over to hand it to him and I see it's a U.S. immigrations and customs form and it has all the dates that I've just been asking him about. I'm like, "Hey, what is this?" He's like, "Well, it's a U.S. immigrations and customs form. This is what they stamp when we come into port now so that we can do shore leave." "So there's all these dates here throughout the summer of 1998. Can you tell me what this means?" "That whole summer I was going between Tokyo, Japan, and Portland, Oregon delivering Toyotas, and every time I came to Portland and unloaded, we'd get shore leave and they'd stamp me in." It was the entire summer. Two months on either side of the crime. "So you were on the ship the whole time?" "Yeah, it's right there on the piece of paper." "Okay, may I have this piece of paper?" "Yes, you may, thank you." And so, like a good lawyer, I took the piece of paper and I got it to the prosecutor, put in front of the judge and with this one single piece of paper that flew out of the man's wallet as he was driving down the road trying to introduce me to the Chaplain of the Siemen's Chapel in Baltimore, the entire defense of Marlin Abrego collapsed. It became clear that he was lying and that he was, in fact, guilty and Katherine was, in fact, telling the truth, and the judge convicted him on August 30, 2001 and sentenced him to life in prison for the rape of Katherine Undalas.

And again, it's this little girl. You are not a rag. You are a person. You are a precious child created by God. To see this little girl square her shoulders back and stand up and stand just a little bit taller when the verdict was read, and she understood that the person who had wronged her so grievously was going to have to answer for what he had done, and that the state, the full power of the state, had come down on her side and said, "We believe you. You do have value." This was IJMs very first conviction and it's true, nothing can hinder the Lord from saving whether by many or few. How does the Kingdom of God come on earth? How is the effected range of God's will expanded? How is evil overcome? How is God's love, His love and power, made real to people who are suffering? It's through you and me. That's God's plan.

Like Jonathan, someone has to step forward and refuse to accept the current situation, refuse to accept the conventional wisdom that there's really nothing that can be done, it's just too big of a problem. Someone has to leave their security and comfort and choose to become vulnerable, put their own personal kingdom at risk, and believe in a greater reality—that God is real and the Bible is true. And that despite the odds, if I take the risk, perhaps God will act, because nothing can hinder the Lord from saving whether by many or by few. I believe God is inviting all of us, you and me, to show the world that this is true. God loves you. He heard your cry for relief and He sent me here to help you.

So what is God inviting you to do today? I'd like you to consider two very concrete ways that you can put your own kingdom at risk so that the Kingdom of God can break through on earth and so that the range of God's affective will can grow.

First, think about the needs that are within arms reach: a neighbor who lost a job, a

friend who lost their spouse, a kid who has lost his way, a brother struggling with addiction, a sister whose husband just walked out on her, a co-worker who is chronically ill and has no family or support system, a group of people here in Edina that have been marginalized who are suffering, for the brutality of the world that has crushed out the light and where hope has been lost. Think about this organization, Source-Annex, that's working on trafficking right here in the Twin Cities. What would God have you do today? Is there someone coming to your heart and mind right now? Some situation you have resolved to do something about it? You got to take a risk—it's messy.

Secondly, I invite you to partner with International Justice Mission to help those who are beyond your arms reach, to become a Freedom Partner. For that little girl that's held captive in a brothel, a child that's being abused with no one to help them, the family that is right now enslaved in a rock quarry, the innocent man rotting away in a jail in Nairobi, Kenya, the widow and the orphan who have been thrown off their land and have no one to help them. Will you put your kingdom at risk? Just a small piece of your kingdom at risk so the Kingdom of God can break through in their lives? Where we can't go, but we can send an investigator, send a lawyer, send a counselor, to help these people who are suffering, who have suffered greatly.

In the baskets on the sides of the pews are envelopes. They're Freedom Partner sign-up cards and I invite you to look at those and think, is there a piece of your kingdom that maybe you can let go of so that God's Kingdom can break forward in the lives of people who have no hope until someone is sent to help them? The miracles that I shared with you today happen very often in our work and this is what happens when people step out in faith to bring the Kingdom of God to people who are suffering in great darkness. If you do fill out one of those envelopes, you can drop them in the boxes in the back, or with the ushers on the way out. I invite you now to close with me in praying this familiar prayer.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*