

PRISONS WEEK SERMON: MATTHEW 25:36

Introduction:

- Today is Prisons Sunday (8th October 2023) and the beginning of Prisons Week;
- Prisons Week is a week of prayer dedicated to raising awareness of everyone affected by prison. It has been running for more than 40 years.

But why should we spend today and this week praying for people in prison? Why is it important for us as Christians to support people affected by prison?

Reason #1: People in prison are people just like us

Read John 8:1-11

- Although the setting is not in prison, this is Jesus stepping into a situation where punishment for breaking the law is being enacted;
- Jesus stands on the side of the accused;
- He writes on the ground (v6): What was He writing? Perhaps it was their secret wrongdoings because He goes on to say, "Let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone." (v7)

This is a reminder of something written by Paul in Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

On your way to church this morning, did you stick to the speed limit the entire time?

- Jesus' heart is always for restoration.

Romans 3:24 continues, "and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

We are all guilty of wrongdoing - the story of A Woman Caught in Adultery reminds us of this.

But, just like Jesus restores the woman, we are all restored to relationship with God.

Reason #2: Jesus asks us to

Read Matthew 25:34-40

- I am sure many of us are involved in wonderful initiatives that feed the hungry, give clothing to the naked and care for the sick.
- But also included in Jesus' instruction is to visit those in prison.

PF Volunteer – "I had done all the other things Jesus asked me to do in Matthew 25, but I hadn't visited those in prison."

- As the passage goes on to say, when we visit people in prison, we are also visiting Jesus.

Read Luke 4:18

- Jesus launches ministry with particular focus on people in prison – quoting Isaiah

And it is not just Jesus who asks us to do this:

"Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering." Hebrews 13: 3

Reason #3: People in our prisons are in good company

- The vast majority of our New Testament was written by someone who was in prison, not just once but numerous times.
- Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon (known as 'The Prison Epistles') were written by the Apostle Paul while under house arrest in Rome.
- We read of other apostles being arrested and imprisoned (Acts 5:18)
- And Jesus himself was arrested and would likely have spent time in prison before His crucifixion.

So, what can we do?

If you are feeling encouraged to support people in prison, Prisons Week is a great opportunity to do so.

- Pray through the Prisons Week prayers;
- Explore the organisations who partner together for Prisons Week;
- Sign-up to pray for people in prison with the Prison Fellowship Prayer Diary;
- Read weekly Bible Studies with people in prison.

You can also get involved in supporting people in prison by becoming a Prison Fellowship volunteer.