

God Loves Prisoners

I'VE HEARD MANY PEOPLE SAY that prisoners deserve what they get. After all, when a person commits a crime he should have to pay for breaking the law. The truth is: God loves prisoners, and He wants to have a



relationship with them, just as He does with the rest of us. The Bible says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23, NKJV, emphasis added).

In fact, there are numerous examples in Scripture of God's working in the lives of ex-offenders. Moses, one of the most successful leaders of the Old Testament, was a known murderer, but God forgave him and used him in His service.

In Exodus 2:11-15 we read about Moses killing a man and hiding his body in the sand. But before Moses killed the man, "he looked this way and that way" to see if there were any witnesses (v.12). Today that is called "premeditated murder" and is punishable by death!

The next day when Moses realized there were some witnesses to the crime, he fled the scene and disappeared into the wilderness. But Exodus 3 records that God called Moses into ministry and gave him the charge of bringing deliverance to Israel. God never mentioned the murder Moses committed.

I believe Moses was repentant during his 40-year stay in the wilderness, and God no longer remembered his sin of murder. Hebrews 10:17 records, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

God used this redeemed and righteous ex-murderer to give us the first five books of the Bible. Where would the church be today without the words the Holy Spirit used Moses to record?

God loves criminals! He hates crime, but He

loves all people. God wants Christians to reach out to prisoners.

Just as He spoke about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and visiting the sick, Jesus also said we are to visit those who are in prison (see Matt. 25:31-46). He told us the sheep will be separated from the goats based on obedience to these verses (see Matt. 25).

Many inmates have served their time and are leaving prison as Christians, yet oftentimes their sentence continues. In many states, they cannot vote, and it takes a miracle for any ex-felon to get meaningful employment or a decent place to live.

I really don't expect society to reach out to these men and women, but the church is commissioned to do so. We must be about our Father's business.

I'm an ex-offender and I know what it is to be redeemed by Jesus for my past mistakes. In 1981 I founded Jesus Inside Prison Ministries (JIPM) to reach out to prisoners and ex-offenders with the gospel.

One ministry we offer is Jesus House, an after-care program that helps ex-offenders bridge the gap between prison release and employment.

We provide for all their basic needs at no cost until they are employed. When they get a job, we charge a small fee for room and board. The program provides residents a safe environment so they can learn how to live in society as law-abiding citizens.

Hebrews 13:3 tells us, "Remember the prisoners as if chained with them." Every church should be involved with a prison ministry, and every believer should minister Christ to those in need of Him. Let's do what we can to demonstrate the love of God to the prison population.

*I don't expect
society to
reach out to
ex-offenders,
but the body
of Christ
must.*

» **WILLIAM BUMPHUS** is the founder of Faith Center Church International, Jesus Inside Prison Ministry and Jesus House, a 46-bed residential drug-recovery and prison aftercare facility in Indianapolis. He is also an author and board member of Coalition of Prison Evangelists in Euless, Texas. William and his wife, Juanita, have five adult children. For more information log on at jipm.org.