

# Does God Go Behind Bars?

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Jesus said, *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved, but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned”* (Mark 16.15-16). Prisoners are part of the creation too. So we are commanded to preach the gospel to every person, including every prisoner. Since God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10.34) and is *“not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3.9), *“God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent”* (Acts 17.30). We can see that God is concerned about sinners everywhere, including those in prison. Now if God cares about prisoners who repent, it is certain that he goes into jail cells to comfort the penitent, obedient believers. God may go (and does go) in his Word, the Bible. He also goes in the person of his children who care enough to visit and teach prisoners the gospel of Christ and minister to their needs.

When a prisoner obeys the gospel of Christ, he becomes one of God’s elect, a child of God whose sins have been blotted out of God’s books and memory. He becomes one as precious as any other of God’s children in the world, and *“Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns?”* (Romans 8.33-34)?

*“This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be*

*saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (1 Timothy 2.3-4). Why? Because *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3.23).

*“For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf”* (2 Corinthians 5.14-15).

The importance of these scriptures is that all people outside of Christ are dead in their trespasses and sins – all are prisoners of sin, whether in a jail or not. Since *“...the wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6.23) and all were dead (sinners), then all must be delivered from the prison of sin by being made alive in Christ Jesus. *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”* (2 Corinthians 5.17).

Notice how Paul says, *“If any man,”* which obviously includes any one among all mankind. God *“is not wishing that any should perish.”* Then salvation is for all mankind, since Jesus died for all.

Some have not been caught in sin and charged with crime by man, but all who are accountable have sinned and must pay the price unless they accept the ransom God paid to redeem their souls.

*“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3.16). “Whoever” includes prisoners. God cares about every soul in or out of prison.*

The Bible has a great deal to say about prisons and prisoners. In fact, most of the outstanding Bible characters were in prison at one time or another, and many of them died at the hands of state executioners. Even though all of them were innocent of any crime worthy of death, they were considered law breakers by the society in which they lived. While the gentle Jesus was guiltless of sin, still he was the greatest revolutionary that ever lived, and his disciples followed in his steps, turning *“the world upside down”* (Acts 17.6). Most were considered law breakers.

Jesus would not turn his face from his purpose of dying in our place, even though it required his being *“numbered with transgressors”* (Mark 15.28).

*“By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due”* (Isaiah 53.8).

*“Bring my soul out of prison, so that I may give thanks to Your name; the righteous will surround me, for You will deal bountifully with me”* (Psalm 142.7).

*“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners”* (Isaiah 61.1).

*“Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You; according to the greatness of Your power preserve those who are doomed to die”* (Psalm 79.11).

*“I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, and I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison”* (Isaiah 42.6-7).

*“Thus says the Lord, In a favorable time I have answered You, and in a day of salvation I have helped You; and I will keep you and give You for a covenant of the people, to restore the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages; saying to those who are bound, Go forth, to those who are in darkness, show yourselves. Along the roads they will feed, and their pasture will be on all bare heights”* (Isaiah 49.8-9).

These scriptures show God’s deep concern for prisoners and all people in trouble and his preparation for their salvation through Christ.

There are a lot of people in prison who ought to be out, and a lot out who ought to be in, and it’s hard to tell the difference in them. I never see one in prison or in any sort of serious trouble but that I say, “There but for the grace of God am I,” and “There by the grace of God was I.” Because of this, I dare not look on one of these unfortunate ones with an “holier than thou attitude.” Any person in jail could be you or me or our son or daughter. Sin is deceitful. *“Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise”* (Proverbs 20.1).

Other types of drugs are also mind derangers, breaking down the inhibitions and moral sensibilities of mankind. Most people in jails and prisons across our nation today are there directly or indirectly because of becoming hooked on mind-destroying chemicals.

Do God and Jesus care? Jesus said *“But his master answered and said to him, ‘You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed.... The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me’”* (Matthew 25.26, 40).

Some of the most beautiful Christians I know are behind prison bars – some on death row – because they have believed and obeyed the gospel of Christ. God has blotted out their sins from his books and memory, and their gratitude and faith are an inspiration to me. The wonderful working of God in the lives of prisoners today is as fascinating to me as his working in the lives of Joseph, Samson, David, Jeremiah, John the Baptizer, Jesus, Paul, and others in the Bible record, who were in prison, rejected by the world, but not forsaken by their God. Yes, God cares for every soul and goes behind prison bars to comfort those who embrace the truth and cast all their cares upon him who cares for them. And if we do not love these children of God, we deny the faith (1 John 4.20-21).

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