

## STUDY 4

### A Friendly Saviour

#### 1. Sometimes people use this passage to draw a connection between sin and sickness.

**Michael Eaton makes the point that *this can happen but it is a mistake to think that all sickness is caused by sin*. Can you think of examples to illustrate his point?**

A person suffering with the disease AIDS may have become infected as a result of sexual promiscuity or marital unfaithfulness. On the other hand, there are people who have contracted AIDS from a blood transfusion where the donor was infected. The same disease but not the same reason. In John 9 Jesus was asked about a man who had been born blind. The question was whether this was the result of the man's sin or his parents. Jesus replied that neither was the case but God allowed it to happen so that God would be glorified by the healing.

Sometimes in scripture sin and sickness occur together in the same context. In *Psalms 103* we read of God who:

*'... forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases,  
who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies,  
who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.'*

This shows that God has compassion on all people who struggle with the two basic problems facing human-kind, our tendency to sin and our vulnerability to sickness and disease. It does not show that there is always a causal connection.

In *James 5*, where the elders anoint and pray for the sick, James says that:

*'...the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up.  
If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.  
Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.  
The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.'*

James says *if* they have sinned, allowing for the possibility but not necessarily the certainty.

#### 2. It is just as possible today for people to miss the real Jesus at work.

**Here are some unexpected people and places you may wish to learn more about:**

##### a. **The revival in South American Prisons where the authorities allow prisoners to run Bible study groups. Many prisoners have become Christian workers after their release.**

The following is an extract (with permission) from an article in the *Renewal Journal*, August 2020. The QR code links to the full article.

The Olmos prison in Argentina used to be notorious for murders, satanic activity and violent riots. Today, however, you can hear inmates and guards praising and worshipping God.

This all began with one man's obedience to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. In the mid



80's Pastor Juan Zuccarelli felt called to prison ministry in Buenos Aires. He had, at that stage, only carried out crusades in the city and was a bit daunted by the task of ministering in prison, but knew he had to do it. He was told that the only way he could get into the prisons would be to become a prison guard.

He applied for a position and found out that he would have to wait eight months for the application to be processed. He hoped that God would change His mind in the meantime and that He would call him somewhere else. Amazingly, within a week, he was contacted by the prison authorities informing him that he had the position. Juan took up his appointment immediately and became a prison guard, knowing that he would use his position to preach the gospel.

300 Prisoners attended the first crusade in Olmos prison. Of those, 100 were saved.

Sadly, these men were then physically, verbally and sexually assaulted by their peers because of their commitment. The Lord revealed that the Christians needed to have separate cell blocks, to create a safe space for them.

In 1987 the idea was proposed to the prison warden, but he was completely against it. Juan remembered an old burnt-out cell block that had previously been completely destroyed. He told the warden that if he would give them that cell, they would fix it, paint it and turn it into the best cell block in the whole of Olmos. He suggested that when the government came to inspect the prison they could show that cell block off as the model cell block. The warden accepted the challenge.

So 21 prisoners started that first cell block and they were able to have times of prayer, fasting and Bible study which produced amazing results. Eventually they took over the entire floor, which was previously known as the 'Elephant's Floor'. It was used to house the most dangerous criminals and even had an altar built to honour Satan. In the past, families would bring the inmates small cats and dogs to burn as sacrifices to Satan, giving him power over the prison. After much prayer, that entire cell block now belongs to Jesus Christ.

The Christians have 24 cell blocks today and 1,600 prisoners have been saved at Olmos.

Once the Christians started to multiply, a group of missionaries was sent from Olmos to another prison to begin a church there. As new prisons were built, authorities approached Olmos and asked them to help them start churches in the new prisons so that they could be built on a similar solid foundation. Up to 200 saved prisoners from Olmos have been sent to new prisons to set up churches. Their growth eventually took over prisons in the entire province. Today there are churches in all 40 prisons across the provinces of Argentina.

The government then contacted Juan to start a completely new Christian prison (before, they had only set up churches within prisons). There were three small prisons which had been empty for about two years and the officials told Juan he could pick any of these he wanted and he would be given the keys.

Juan identified Daniel Tajeda, an evangelical Christian, to be the warden of the new prison. He was very young at the time and only 96th in line for the position. However, Daniel's faithfulness outshone the other candidates and he was appointed as the warden of 10 prisoners. From there it grew from 25 to 130 inmates. This prison is called 'Christ, the Only Hope'.

**b. Former drug addicts from the street gangs of Hong Kong or New York who serve Jesus after their deliverance from drug addiction.**

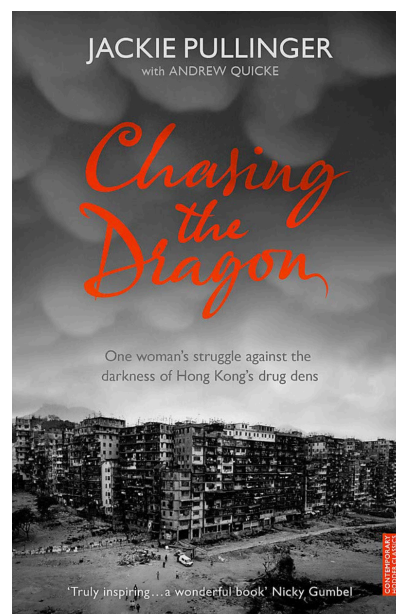
The story of Jacky Pullinger in Hong Kong is told in her book *Chasing the Dragon*. The QR code links to the website of St Stephen's Society, her official website.

Jackie Pullinger is a British woman who lives and works among the poor, the homeless and the drug addicts of Hong Kong. Over thirty years ago she went to Hong Kong on a one-way ticket, and arrived knowing no one with just \$100 HK in her pocket. She lived and worked in Kowloon's notorious 'Walled City' and by 1981 she



had set up the St Stephen's Society, which provides rehabilitation homes for recovering drug addicts, prostitutes and gang members. By December 2007 it had grown to provide homes for

200 people. The charity's work has been recognised by the Hong Kong government who donated the land for the rehabilitation homes.



**2. It also works the other way round. People who claim to be acting for God may not be all they seem.**

**a. Some high-profile tele-evangelists have been exposed for living lives inconstant with their public testimony.**

These are sad stories and unfortunately the secular media tends to pick up on negative news and present sensational exposés. You may have seen some. They serve as a reminder of the frailty of human nature and the need to pray the Lord's Prayer, *'...lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.'* You might like to think why it is that the secular media and press seem to have bias towards bad news. Satan was described by Jesus as the ruler of this world. He is dethroned but still active and his defeat needs to be enforced by God's people in the name of Jesus.

**b. There are pastors who have (mis)used Biblical teaching on giving to exploit their people and to finance lavish lifestyles.**

Since the theme of these questions is the real Jesus at work, it may be more profitable to have a discussion on why it is appropriate for pastors to live on the same economic level as the people they are serving. Jesus, who was called to an itinerant (mobile) ministry, did say of Himself, *"Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head."* (Matthew 8:20).

**3. So sometimes unlikely people live with the real Jesus while people who confess Him publicly do not! Such examples raise the question – how can we discern what is authentic and genuinely Christian from what is not? That takes us back to this passage.**

A helpful verse to think about is *John 13:35* which Jesus gave as a way of discerning who is a genuine follower. *"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* And, of course, love is shown by sacrificial actions.

## STUDY 5

### Grace in God's Kingdom

- 1. This passage stimulates us to think about traditions. It would be wrong to conclude that traditions are always wrong. But what is wrong is when traditions add burdens or contradict the clear teachings of scripture correctly interpreted. What traditions do you have in your church or Christian community? Are they helpful or useful? Is there a process for reviewing them and changing them?**

Perhaps a good place to begin would be to make a list of traditions. Here are some examples:

- In our church we always meet at 11.00am.
- In our church the pastor's wife always leads worship.
- In our church the children have a separate meeting.
- In our church everyone puts on their very best clothes for Sunday worship.
- In our church we meet in a school classroom.

No church can function without some traditions. Traditions reflect the practical circumstances of the particular congregation and the general culture. The essential thing to think about is whether they are helpful. As soon as they become a hindrance or a limitation, or when circumstances change, it is time for a rethink.

- 2. A Christian has been set free from living under the law. This does not mean that a Christian lives a lawless life doing anything he or she feel like! Explain why? There is more on this important subject in Paul's letter to the Galatians. See <https://bit.ly/SlicesGalatians>**

3. At this stage it is probably not wise to go into great depth. But legalism (living by rules) has been a problem for the church over the ages. It is good for Christians to have a practical understanding of Galatians and Romans - so definitely one for future study.

- 4. What for you has been the most striking point in this study and why?**

As has been said before, responses will vary. It is good to keep the discussion focussed on practical matters, things that will make a difference to they way we live. There are some verses in Paul's letters which give some instruction on what is helpful and what is not (*1 Timothy 1:4, 4:17; 2 Timothy 4:4*).

- 5. Can you think of a situation (either from the Bible or from your own observation) where somebody has behaved in a religious manner and yet this was cruel.**

In the *Parable of the Good Samaritan* the priest passed by on the other side. He was following the religious rules about cleanness. But he ignored the practical needs of a fellow human being who had been beaten and robbed.