

6pm Sunday 6 September 2026

Ezekiel 33:7-11, Romans 13:8 to end, Matt 18:15-20 – Why sin matters so much to God

This summer's debate around the potential early release of prisoners has highlighted the complicated impact of criminal behaviour. Obviously, there is its impact on the victims of the criminal behaviour. But there is also an impact on those who have committed crimes. And finally, there are the families of those who have are being punished. In this month of Creationtide, as we think about our relationship with God our Creator and the Creator of our world, we are very aware that humanity is not living in this world in the way that we ought to.

But if the exhortations of tonight's readings all have a common theme, it is that our merciful God has not yet washed his hands of the world's wicked ways. Let's have a closer look at our readings now, because each of them has something to tell us about why God would care so much about the impact of sin.

First, sin matters to God because of the damage that it leads people to do, to others and to themselves. When people realise the harm that has been done it can lead to despair. Losing the support and sympathy of friends and family can make finding a way out feel impossible. Sin weighs heavy.

Thinking about our reading from Ezekiel, Ezekiel's message is for the exiles who've been taken from Judah to Babylon, at the point where a survivor is about to share with them the full implications of the fall of Jerusalem. Jerusalem's destruction didn't come out of nowhere but resulted from a combination of poor political judgments by catastrophically bad kings, all of which was happening in conjunction with the rise of the Babylonian empire. But as the full measure of the destruction of Jerusalem hits home Ezekiel knows that the exiles from Jerusalem will be saying: ***Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?***

Sin weighs heavy. Because sin wastes lives. Sin leads to despair. Sin makes us doubt that God even exists, let alone that he loves us or cares about our world. And that matters to God. Because God does love the world he created and the people who live in it. With the Ten Commandments, God had given the Israelites, fleeing from slavery in Egypt, a code to teach them how to live together as a community. They are expressed as a series of prohibitions – ***you shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not covet*** – but they all ***are summed up in this word “Love your neighbour as yourself” [because] love does no wrong to a neighbour.*** The Ten Commandments are proof that God cares about and loves his people.

God particularly cares about the church, and churches are not immune to the impact of sin. When one member sins against another the community becomes fractured and divided as people take sides, and then that causes people to fall out of the community. Jesus' advice for when one church member had sinned against another was to try a private conversation first, because that might be enough to bring somebody back into friendship and community. Then, and then only if necessary, to follow that up with a meeting with one or two others. Finally, and only as a last resort, ***if the offender refuses to listen even to the church***, to have nothing further to do with that person.

Churches need to be serious about the impact of sin on the spiritual health of the church because every church exists within a wider spiritual dimension. The church isn't just a social group. As the body of Christ here in earth the church has the responsibility of carrying out the mission that Jesus gave to his disciples. When we pray that the church might stay free from sin we can pray with the confidence given to us by Jesus in knowing that ***where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them***, and having been told by Jesus that ***whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven***.

Sin and its impact matters to God because God cannot be holy unless he judges the wicked. In the words given to the Ezekiel, if the wicked ***do not turn from their ways, [the wicked] shall die in their iniquity***. And if we are honest with ourselves, we would be appalled if God did not judge the wicked. Nobody who is has experienced the impact of violence and greed; or of injustice and of indifference to suffering wants to hear that God will do nothing.

But we remember, too, that sin and its impact matters to God because God is invested in his plan to deal once and for all with the problem of sin. God sent his Son to die for us on the cross because God ***has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but [rather] that the wicked turn from their ways and live***. God has embraced us as his own, and even when we turn away, even when we rebel, his love remains steadfast. He is the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy. This Creationtide, let us remember with thanksgiving the Creator who has given us our Saviour.