

Did This Raped, Trafficked Girl Deserve a Life Sentence for Killing Her Abuser?

To help us understand today's justice system, Bishop Joseph W. Walker III of Mt. Zion Baptist Church points to Chapter 5 in the book of Mark. Jesus and His disciples arrived in the region of Gadara and encountered a man possessed with multiple demons:

He lived among the tombs. And no one could constrain him, not even with chains, because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. But he had pulled the chains apart and broken the shackles to pieces. And no one could subdue him. Always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones (Mark 5:3-5).

The man was bound up—spiritually and literally. It is not said whether this was the community's go-to method or its last resort; either way, Walker posits that it isn't much different from how our society handles a "problem child."

"What causes people to choose an oppressive mechanism as a remedy?" he says. "Too many use a nonredemptive approach to deliverance that is in conflict with the teaching of Jesus. Rather than use a model that liberates the man, they seek to tie him up further."

Having sat in courtrooms and visited prisons and jails, Walker is familiar with how those in power treat those in need of rehabilitation.

A good example is the story of Cyntoia Brown.

In 2004, at the age of 16, Brown shot a man who had picked her up in his truck and solicited her for sex. Convicted of murder (and robbery), Brown was given a life sentence.

Walker was among the many who lobbied for clemency in Brown's case. Members of his church were already working with Brown through a faith-based mentoring program. Eventually, in January 2019, Brown was granted clemency. Come August, she will be released.

Despite the victory, Walker highlights the case as an example of an oppressed individual facing more oppression in the name of so-called justice.

Walker says, "People who are plagued by systematic oppression caused by social inequities such as unequal education and impoverished neighborhoods that are riddled with crime, drugs and sex trafficking more frequently find themselves in the criminal justice system."

For Brown, her struggles were imposed upon her from birth. She was born with a type of fetal alcohol syndrome that slows brain development and can manifest in erratic and impulsive behavior. When she was a teenager, Brown was lured by a man who took her in and would rape and beat her. He told her that nobody would want her and that she was better off as a prostitute.

The man trafficked Brown. But one frightening encounter with a man in a pickup truck led to Brown picking up a gun and shooting him. Thus, the life sentence.

Walker believed this was not a case to be met with harsh punishment. Brown's story is a product of neglect, abuse and circumstance.

"Although many situations merit harsh consequences with regard to criminal activity, there are countless cases where a different approach would bring about a more restorative

result," Walker says.

His church plans to help Brown reintegrate into society by assisting her with job placement and ultimately being her spiritual support system.

Though Brown's community failed her as a child, her community is now helping to restore her. Walker thinks back to the Gadarene man who was possessed and thus chained up and isolated in the mountains. A man who was already afflicted was pushed to the margins so as not to disturb the peace. Walker warns Christians not to follow this model.

"Dealing with spiritual warfare is the responsibility of not just the individual but also the community at large."

Whether it's a legion of demons or a criminal act that corrupts a person, the community may need to get involved to help bring about total restoration. {eoa}

Bishop Joseph W. Walker III, DMin, is the senior pastor of the historic Mt. Zion Baptist Church of Nashville. His book *Restored at the Root: Get to the Source of Social, Emotional, and Spiritual Struggle* releases August 6, 2019. Walker serves as the international presiding bishop in the Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship International. He received a master of divinity degree from Vanderbilt University and a doctor of ministry degree from Princeton Theological Seminary. He holds two honorary doctorates, from Meharry Medical College and Southern University. Bishop Walker is a regular guest on "The Rickey Smiley Morning Show" radio program and has been a guest on CNN, CBS This Morning and The Roland Martin Show. He and his wife, Dr. Stephanie H. Walker, have two children.

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