

PASTOR'S THOUGHTS

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Peter Sullivan Freed After 38 Years in One of the UK's Longest Miscarriages of Justice

Peter Sullivan, a 68-year-old man who spent nearly four decades behind bars for a crime he did not commit, has had his 1987 murder conviction quashed by the Court of Appeal. This marks what is believed to be the longest-running miscarriage of justice in British legal history.

Sullivan was wrongfully convicted of murdering 21-year-old Diane Sindall in Bebington, Merseyside. Sindall was brutally attacked and sexually assaulted while walking to a petrol station after her van broke down. The case shocked the nation, but new DNA evidence has now proved Sullivan's innocence.

Despite two failed appeal attempts, advances in forensic science led the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) to re-examine the case. DNA tests confirmed the presence of an unknown male's DNA at the crime scene—conclusively excluding Sullivan.

In court, Lord Justice Holroyde declared the conviction unsafe. Sullivan, who appeared via video from HMP Wakefield, was visibly emotional. His sister, Kim Smith, tearfully celebrated the long-awaited exoneration, saying, "We've done it."

Merseyside Police have pledged to continue the search for the real perpetrator, with over 260 men already screened. Detective Chief Superintendent Karen Jaundrill acknowledged the ongoing pain for Sindall's family and reaffirmed their commitment to justice.

The case has sparked renewed calls for reform of the appeals process. Campaigners, including legal experts and charities, argue the system fails to promptly correct wrongful convictions. The Prime Minister's spokesperson described the case as a "grave miscarriage of justice" and promised further review.

Sullivan's story mirrors a powerful moment in the Bible, where Jesus heals a man who had been disabled for 38 years at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1–9). Just as that man was asked, "Do you want to get well?" and rose to walk again, Sullivan's release symbolises a restoration long delayed—but finally realised.

Sometimes we fall into the trap of thinking that this (what we see) is an individual's confirmed future potential and nothing more. However, let us pray that we will not simply settle for our current position, but rather strive for the fulfilment of our future potential in God.