

No Murder + Protect Life

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning. My name is August Fern and I am part of the Berkeley El Cerrito Richmond Kensington Community Group. Maybe we'll come up with a better name. Today's scripture reading is from the book of Exodus chapter 20 verses 1 and 2 and verse 13 as printed in the liturgy. A reading from the book of Exodus.

And God spoke all these words. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall not murder.

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever. Good morning, everyone. Thank you, August. In case you were wondering, August didn't mess up.

[1:15] We're going to get to Numbers 35 later on. But I asked her to just read the Exodus verses because I wanted us to feel the shortness and the simplicity of these words.

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall not murder. In the Hebrew, it's just two words. Lo, rasach, don't kill. That's it.

It's two words. That's the sixth commandment. And probably the most obvious one, right? Last time I was up here, it was the fourth commandment. Honor the Sabbath, right?

Keep it holy. Probably the least intuitive, the least agreed upon. But today, if there's one we could all get behind, surely it'd be this one, right? Christians, Muslims, Hindus, right?

Atheists, agnostics, Republicans, Democrats. Of course, killing should be forbidden. Because, the argument often goes, if people were permitted to kill at will, how could a society function?

[2:13] It's just common sense, right? Well, this question, the question I want to raise this morning is, is it actually common sense? Is, thou shalt not kill as obvious as we like to think?

Because how can we be sure that some lives aren't actually worth taking and disposing of? Who says that your life or mine is worth preserving? On what basis? What if a strong argument could be made that the world would be a better place if this person or that person or that people group were removed?

What if it made businesses more profitable? Countries more secure? Households more comfortable? Resources more accessible and plentiful? What about those who contribute nothing or like far less than what they consume?

I mean, wouldn't the world be a more convenient place if we could get rid of all the inconvenient people? And, you know, this might sound ridiculous, right, to even consider. And to spend time going deeper to discover an unshakable foundation for thou shalt not kill might seem unnecessary to you, but take a look around.

Jog your memory with world history. Sober up to the reality that thou shalt not kill may not be as self-evident as we like to think. You see, if we take the sixth commandment for granted as simply self-evident, we risk missing what's actually so striking about this commandment.

[3:37] Because remember again, I want to bring us back always, whenever we preach about the Ten Commandments, we always need to remember who this commandment was given to.

Remember, the Hebrews receiving this command to not kill had only recently escaped an empire, right, where the most powerful man in the kingdom had previously decided that killing certain people was not only permissible and justified, but necessary.

In Exodus chapter 1, when the Hebrews are fruitful and multiplying Pharaoh, he doesn't see blessing, he sees threat. So what does he do? He makes a calculation. He calculated the value of

Hebrew life in relationship to his empire, and thus he declared their worth in his kingdom. He says, first, you will be my slaves. Your lives belong to me now. And then, when they still continue to increase, uh-oh, too many lives, too many potential threats, just kill the baby boys at birth, throw them into the Nile.

Pharaoh took it upon himself to decide which human lives were disposable and which were worth preserving based on his own interest. He assumed that he had the authority to make that call. In his mind, certain human lives, these Hebrew lives, belonged not to themselves nor to anyone else. But to him. And that's how it worked in his kingdom. The most powerful man got to decide what other people's lives were worth.

[5:02] But it's different here in the Ten Commandments. Here at Mount Sinai, when these liberated Hebrews are receiving the Sixth Commandment, God is not just giving them a practical rule and a guardrail to protect them from hurting each other.

He's giving them a window into his heart. He's showing them where all of life comes from, to whom it rightfully belongs, and just how immeasurably precious it is to him.

So, you know, last time I was up here preaching the Fourth Commandment, if I conveyed anything at all, I hoped that it was that our time is not our own. Well, today is the same.

If there's anything that you get out today, it's the same. It's our lives, all lives, our neighbor's lives are not our own. Or Pharaoh's or anyone else's, but God's alone.

Lord, will you pray with me? Father, we want to hear your word. And to those of us who might just smirk and say, of course thou shalt not kill, O Lord.

[6:05] Show us how deep this goes. In our world, in our own hearts. Show us the ways that we've fallen short. And at the same time, show us the ways that you lift us up in Christ.

Let us behold him this morning. In his name we pray. Amen. Now, maybe when you hear this idea that our lives are not our own, that gives you some pause, because doesn't that kind of sound like dehumanizing bad news that strips us of our human dignity?

Like, if my life doesn't belong to me, and if my neighbor's life doesn't belong to them, if our lives belong to someone else, like Pharaoh, who claimed that the Hebrews' lives belong to him, doesn't that decrease the value of life?

Doesn't that subject my and my neighbor's worth and value to whomever we belong to? And doesn't that open up the door to some Pharaoh figure getting to decide what we're worth to him, and how he might use and abuse us according to his own self-interested purposes?

Well, that's precisely why it matters so much who our lives belong to. Because if our lives belong to some other finite, fallen, self-interested creature, that would be terrible news for sure.

[7:17] Because our lives would then be valued or devalued according to how useful we were to whomever we belonged. But the sixth commandment, and by the way, sixth commandment, thou shalt not murder.

Okay, that's your next one. But the sixth commandment doesn't merely teach us that our lives aren't our own. It teaches us, more importantly, that our lives and our neighbor's lives belong to God.

And far from diminishing the worth and dignity of our lives, belonging to God is actually the very foundation of every human life's immeasurable worth. And here's why. First, God's the one who gave us this life, even when he didn't have to.

The triune God, right, complete in and of himself, eternally existing as Father, Son, and Spirit, though he never needed to create the universe, nor human beings like you and me, he freely chose to create us and to gift us life.

So see, life is valuable because it's a priceless gift from a deliberate God. And then on top of that, he didn't just gift us life, but he gifted us the status of being the crown of his creation, right?

[8:25] Of all creatures he made, he made humans, us uniquely in his image to reign and rule, to represent and reflect him to the world. And so what this means is that our dignity, our value, our worth, have from the very beginning, to no credit of our own, been established and grounded by the God who made us to love him and to be loved by him as his image-bearing children.

Worth and dignity, independent of our intelligence, our usefulness, our productivity, or anything we could ever accomplish, our worth from the very beginning was a gift received, not achieved.

And this is the basis for why every human life matters. Even those lives we're tempted to believe don't matter, even those lives the powerful or the majority consider least valuable. And remember those Hebrew baby boys, right?

That Pharaoh wanted to just toss into the Nile. Their lives held no value according to Pharaoh's computational analysis, offered him nothing but potential threat, had no strength or skill to build him his storehouses, so he was happy to toss them.

It made sense based on his calculated evaluation. But the midwives, right? Shiphrah and Puah, they feared God, is what the scriptures say, and thus they saw in these weak, defenseless, vulnerable baby boys, far more value than Pharaoh was willing to see.

[9 : 48] Even Pharaoh's own daughter could see it. She opens up that basket, right? And there's a crying baby. And she knows he's a Hebrew child. She knows what her father has commanded in the kingdom.

But at that moment, looking at this helpless little boy, she doesn't see a threat to Egypt. She sees a baby, a human, a human life worth rescuing, protecting, and loving.

A life that was never Pharaoh's to calculate, but God's to cultivate and cherish. So this is the glory of what it means that our lives and our neighbors are not our own, but God's alone.

Our lives don't become less precious because they're not our own, but priceless because they belong to God who made us and who made us his own in his image.

Now, if you wouldn't mind looking in your pew Bibles, if you could turn to page six. It's right there, just a couple pages over. Genesis chapter nine. I think it'll be very helpful if you have that in front of you. Genesis chapter nine, page six.

[10 : 46] Because I want to show you just how much God cherishes human life. Remember, God has just cleansed the earth of a world filled with violence and bloodshed.

And as Noah and his family step out of the ark, again, page six, Genesis chapter nine. As Noah and his family step out of the ark, God renews his blessing upon humanity.

Look at verse one. It says, be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. And then look again at verse seven, right? As for you, be fruitful and increase in number. Multiply on the earth and increase upon it.

You see that? God wants humans to flourish. He wants human life to thrive. But notice what's sandwiched between the repeated blessings. In verses four to six, God tells Noah not to eat meat with its lifeblood still in it because the blood is the life and the life belongs to God.

And then he says something even more sobering about human blood. Verse five, for your lifeblood, I will surely demand an accounting. Even from animals that take human life. And verse six, whoever sheds human blood by humans shall their blood be shed.

[11 : 51] For in the image of God has God made mankind. Now, do you see what God is doing? Right in the middle of his blessing of life, he establishes a principle to protect that life.

Because human life is so precious that when it's wrongfully taken, God demands justice. All creation demands justice. Remember when Cain murdered Abel.

Abel's blood cries out for justice. As the dirt takes in the blood, it screams out at the wrongness of what's just happened. Justice is demanded. Now, this raises important questions, though, about capital punishment that we don't have time to resolve today.

But remember, this principle is given to Noah, not even just to ancient Israel. Its significance is universal. But how we faithfully apply biblical principles of justice in different societies, it requires careful theological reflection.

We can't simply cut and paste every civil law of ancient Israel into our modern legal systems. But every society is accountable to the God who cherishes human life this much.

[12 : 59] This God and his principles of justice and dignity and the protection of life, it ought to inform how we live and even the laws that govern us.

Because God's law isn't merely concerned with punishing wrongdoing. It's concerned with protecting, preserving, and promoting the life that God so cherishes.

And see, that's what I want us to discover about the sixth commandment this morning. God isn't just telling us what not to do with human life. He's teaching us how to cherish the lives that he cherishes.

Thou shalt not murder isn't just a prohibitive commandment. It's a positive calling to cherish and nurture human life. And when you look at the rest of God's law, you discover that this calling goes far beyond simply being able to say, hey, I never killed anybody.

I never murdered. Now look down with me at the passage that August didn't read, Numbers chapter 35. In Numbers 35, God commands Israel to establish these places called cities of refuge.

[14:06] And what's a city of refuge? Well, imagine that you're chopping wood with your neighbor. And as you're chopping, the head of your axe accidentally flies off. And it strikes him and it kills him. You had no intention of hurting him.

It was an accident. But now a human life has been taken. And in ancient Israel, the family of the person who died might seek retribution through someone called the avenger of blood.

So what God did was he established these cities where someone responsible for an unintentional death could flee and receive fair judgment rather than being killed by an avenger.

Because God's acknowledging there's a difference, right, between accidentally killing and then deliberately murdering someone. But here's what's remarkable. Even when it's an accident, there are still very serious consequences.

In Numbers chapter 35, look at verse 25. God says that the person who unintentionally caused the death must remain in that city of refuge until the high priest dies.

[15:08] They can't simply return home, back to their family, live an ordinary life. Verse 27 says that if they leave the city before that time, the avenger of blood is permitted to kill them without incurring blood guilt.

Now, that's a pretty shocking provision to our modern ears, right? But notice what it communicates about the seriousness of a human life taken.

Even when no one meant for someone to die, even when there's no murderous intent, the loss of that life is never treated as some small or insignificant thing with no life-changing consequences.

The sixth commandment is not just thou shalt not murder. It's broader. You know, in the Hebrew, remember those two words, lo, ratsach, don't kill, right? Well, throughout Numbers 35, the person who's killed someone, whether intentionally, like with a blunt object in verse 16, or even unintentionally, like in verse 11, that person is called the same thing, a ratsacher, right, a killer, a manslayer.

The NIV often translates it person accused of murder, like in verse 12. But in the Hebrew, it's much plainer. It's just one word, the killer, the manslayer. And even in verse 27, when the avenger of blood kills that person outside the city of refuge, that Hebrew word there is the same, it's ratsach.

[16:29] So this word can be used for different kinds of human killing, whether murder, an accidental death, or even the killing of an avenger of blood. But what this means, though, is that though not every instance of killing is morally identical, there is a difference, right, between murder and accidentally killing someone, or maybe death that occurs through self-defense or a just war.

But at the end of the day, what this is saying is that killing is still killing. A life taken, even accidentally, is always tragic and consequential in the eyes of God.

Even accidentally. But now, if that's how seriously God takes accidental killing, let me tell you what he says about preventable killing, or killing through negligence.

In Exodus 21, it says, If you know that your ox has a violent history of goring people, and you don't keep it penned up, and it goes out and gores and kills again, not only is that bull to be stoned and not eaten, but you, the owner, could now face the death penalty as well.

In Deuteronomy chapter 22, God says, When you build a new house, make a barrier on top, around your roof, so that you may not bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if someone falls from your roof.

[17:52] Do you hear that? The guilt of bloodshed for not proactively protecting your neighbors from your deadly ox or your treacherous roof. See, cherishing life isn't just about never intending to kill somebody.

It's about taking responsibility to protect people from preventable harm. How safely we drive, how well we protect our employees, whether we're willing to spend the money to fix something dangerous, what policies we vote for and advocate, it all matters to the God of the Sixth Commandment.

You know, I was reminded of this in a pretty embarrassing way just a couple weeks ago. I was driving home from my 6.15 a.m. class at the gym, and I thought I'd get a head start, right, on the day, clear my inbox while driving.

And then, of course, waiting at the red light, CHP officer pulls up right next to me, lights go on. You know, the embarrassing thing is that I was more upset about the time and money that this was costing me than the danger I'd been creating for everybody else around me.

Now, I wasn't trying to hurt anybody. I was trying to be productive. I was trying to get ahead, right? But think about it. I was treating my own convenience, my own productivity, as though it mattered more than the safety of the other people sharing the road with me.

[19:16] And that's exactly why we have laws against distracted driving, not because the government is just looking for ways to make our lives inconvenient, but because the lives of people around us are worth protecting. See, cherishing life and obeying the Sixth Commandment, it means not merely refraining from taking life, but it means protecting life proactively, not neglecting it.

But even further, the Sixth Commandment doesn't just call us to not neglect life, but also to nurture it. God doesn't just want us to protect people from dying.

He wants us to help people live. That's what's implied in the Sixth Commandment. He's saying, live to help your neighbors thrive, consider their lives and their livelihoods. Give you another example from the Law of Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 24.

God commands that the Israelites must never take someone's millstone as collateral for a debt.

Now, why would God care about something as mundane as a millstone?

Well, back then, especially for the poor who couldn't afford the luxury of purchasing processed grain, they needed their own millstone to grind the grain to make bread. It was how their families were able to eat.

[20:26] And so, if you took away someone's millstone, you could effectively be taking away their ability to feed themselves. And do you know how God describes that in Deuteronomy chapter 24?

He says that to take a millstone as collateral is like taking someone's life as collateral. Literally, in the Hebrew, it's like taking their nefesh, their soul, as collateral.

So, think about it. God isn't merely concerned that nobody kills their neighbor. He's concerned that nobody deprives their neighbor of what they need to live. And I think this should profoundly shape what Christians mean when many of them say that they're pro-life.

We need to be pro-all lives, all of life. You know, in Iceland, nearly every pregnancy with a confirmed prenatal diagnosis of Down Syndrome ends in abortion.

It's heartbreaking to me. One of my best friends, his son, has Down Syndrome. In some people's minds, they're, you know, curating the human race through eugenics. But in the eyes of God, they are diminishing, devaluing, depriving the human race.

[21:34] Because, like, since when did someone's disability determine whether their life was worth living? The sixth commandment means protecting and advocating for unborn human life, which begins at conception.

And just as importantly, though, every mother, especially those who feel like abortion is their best and only option, especially those not knowing how they're going to keep their jobs, how they're going to make rent, afford child care.

We need to care for them, too. The spirit and the trajectory of the sixth commandment calls us to come alongside these women and their unborn children, providing practical help, financial support, child care, friendship, whatever we can to help thrive, help their lives thrive.

This also means calling fathers to take responsibility for the lives that they've helped bring into this world, holding men accountable, right, for the caring of their children. It means being willing to step into foster care and adoption, supporting the families who do.

One of the things that, you know, that really distinguished the early Christian church in the world from the surrounding Roman Empire was their concern for unwanted children.

[22:45] Back then, it wasn't uncommon for unwanted babies to be abandoned, left exposed to die. And you know what? Christians didn't simply condemn that practice. They were known for taking those children in.

See, in the sixth commandment, it doesn't just tell women facing unexpected pregnancies what not to do. It commands all of us to actively help them find a way forward, to build a world where women facing unexpected pregnancies don't feel that termination is their only option.

And of course, this is calling to nurture life. It doesn't end with mothers and their children. It extends to our elderly neighbors who need care, people with disabilities who need support, the sick who need someone to come alongside them, families struggling just to get by.

Because every one of these lives is precious to God. And even when we ourselves can't see anything precious or valuable about our own lives, you need to hear that God can.

God does. And this is so important for you. If you're here today, you're suffering so deeply that you're unsure whether life is even worth living anymore. Or maybe you feel so hopeless, so alone, like a better future for yourself in this mess of a world is an absolute impossibility.

[24:07] Maybe you feel like the prophet Elijah who begged God to take his life. Or like Job's wife who believed that there's a point in which the best and most sensible thing to do with our remaining human life is just to curse God and die.

The sixth commandment is a word for you from God. And not just a prohibitive word, but a word of hope. And listen, I don't want to minimize anyone's suffering here. Some of you are carrying burdens and pain.

I can't even begin to imagine. But contrary to what the wisdom of our world constantly blasts in our ears, telling us that the purpose of life is to avoid suffering, no, that is not the purpose of life.

The purpose of life is not simply to avoid suffering. And suffering, no matter how terrible, it doesn't make your life worthless or meaningless or without purpose.

I mean, how could we not believe this when we look at Jesus? Was his life somehow less precious because of his infinite suffering? Was his suffering evidence that his life was no longer worth living?

[25:07] Of course not. In fact, the most loving, most life-giving act in all of human history was accomplished through his suffering on the cross. We'll come back to that. But listen, I'm not saying our suffering is the same as Jesus's or that God promises to take away all our pain in this life.

Even Job, right? When God restored his fortunes to X, he still remained a father who'd lost 10 children. He carried that the rest of his life. We shouldn't pretend that every loss will be made right in this lifetime.

But suffering cannot erase the worth of God, the worth that God has given your life. Suffering cannot place you beyond his loving purposes.

So this matters enormously for how we think about suicide, euthanasia, physician-assisted death, because our lives are not ours simply to discard when suffering becomes unbearable.

This doesn't mean we must prolong the dying process through every possible medical intervention, but it does mean recognizing the difference between allowing someone to die and intentionally causing their death.

[26:13] And again, for the rest of us, it means that when someone is suffering so deeply that they can no longer see the value of their own life, we mustn't abandon them to that suffering but pursue them as evangelists of hope and of human worth.

We ought to be the people who come alongside them, help carry their burden, seek to relieve their pain, and remind them through our words, through our actions, that their lives are still precious to us and to their maker.

And I know I touched on this super quickly and quite conceptually, but if you're here today, man, and you're struggling with thoughts like this, of ending your life, please don't suffer quietly and alone.

Your pastors, your elders, our deacons, we're here for you. We want to know you. We want to walk alongside you. At least know to call 988, right? Suicide Crisis Lifeline.

Reach out. Reach out to us. Reach out to mental health professionals. We can help you connect with some. Find someone you trust. You need to know your life is precious to God.

[27:16] It's precious to us, and it's precious to your Father in Heaven. So all this to say, cherishing life, honoring the Sixth Commandment, has vast implications.

It means caring not merely that people live, but how they're able to live and flourish. Now, another thing I need to say about honoring the Sixth Commandment and our calling to cherish human life is that this is not just a matter of what we do or don't do with our hands.

Ultimately, it's a matter of our hearts, right? I need to remind you what Jesus says. Matthew chapter 5, Jesus takes the Sixth Commandment, and he presses it into our hearts. He says, you have heard that it was said, you shall not murder, but I tell you, anyone who says, you fool, right?

You moron, you worthless person, will be in danger of the fire of hell. The Apostle John puts it even more bluntly. Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer.

Think about that. You can go your entire life without killing somebody and still have fallen far, far short of the Sixth Commandment. When you look at another human being made in God's image and you regard them as worthless, maybe it's someone in your family, someone who's hurt you, someone at work, someone in this or that political party who drives you crazy, or maybe it's that

person who's so worthless to you, you don't even see them.

[28 : 42] If we don't desire the good of all such people, if we cannot behold and celebrate the image of God in certain other people, we've broken the Sixth Commandment, in which God calls us not merely to refrain from hurting people, but to honor their dignity from our hearts.

And men, could you imagine a world where we actually live this way, generation after generation? What would our families, our neighborhoods, our schools, our cities look like if we genuinely cherished the lives that God cherishes?

Imagine living in the Bay Area here if we cared even half as much about whether other people's children had the opportunity to flourish as we did our own. Imagine a world where the poor and the homeless weren't just problems to be solved or causes to donate to, but neighbors whose names we knew, whose stories we listened to, whose burdens we actually helped carry.

Imagine a world in which we opened up not just our wallets, but our homes, our calendars, our lives, joyfully and increasingly. Like what if we didn't seek to flourish instead of our neighbors, but we sought to flourish together with our neighbors?

I mean, wouldn't you love to live in a world like that? Don't you want your children to live in a world like that, to inherit a world like that? But here's the problem. Why is it that even when we know how precious human life is, or we say we know, even when we long for a world shaped by the spirit and trajectory of the Sixth Commandment, and even when the 2.6 billion Christians in the world and countless others throughout the centuries would likely agree and profess along with us that every human life does belong to God, why is it that we still find it so much easier and more sensible to take life than to cherish life, to break the Sixth Commandment rather than honor it?

[30 : 37] And again, I'm not just talking about murder, right? How many of us have become so focused on optimizing our good lives, stabilizing and strengthening our safety nets, planning our even brighter futures, that we have no time, no margin, and increasingly no idea how to defend, nurture and cherish lives outside of our own?

Now there's nothing wrong with wanting to provide for our families and in fact, we should start with those in closest proximity to us, but is it just me? Or can we become so preoccupied with securing our own lives that we barely notice the lives of others around us slipping through the cracks?

You know, when people become invisible to us, in another real sense, they've also become expendable to us. When we're so busy calculating what it takes to build a good life for ourselves, have we considered whose lives aren't even entering into the calculation?

Or whose lives we might be cheapening without even realizing it? Are we really so different from Pharaoh, bestowing worth only on lives that supported and secured his kingdom?

What was the result of that? Lives got taken, taken into his own hands to be valued or rather devalued however he pleased. That's what happens when we disregard the sixth commandment.

[32 : 02] Lives are taken that were never ours to take. Even when we've never murdered a single soul, we're all guilty. We've all taken life in some sense. We've all fallen short of the mark of the supposedly self-evident sixth commandment.

And what's so devastating about this is that these lives that we've taken, we can't give back. While all of us can and have taken life, who of us can give life?

And see, here's what I want us to recognize. The sixth commandment, Genesis 9, the rest of God's good law, it's all given to protect and preserve and promote human life. But even God's good law could never give life to the dead.

It can demand an accounting for life that's been taken. It can disincentivize and discourage the taking of life, but it cannot give life back. Think about that for a second, right?

Someone kills someone and then they receive capital punishment. We put them to death as well.

Sure, you could say that there's some justice on display there, right? But don't we also have this feeling that man, like, that didn't bring the life back, right?

[33 : 11] And now here we are with two deaths. It feels like a net negative, doesn't it? The sixth commandment, the law of God, could never result in a net positive, nor undo our guilt and make our hearts new, cleanse our hearts of all the ways that we've taken life.

No, for that, we need the giver of life himself. And that is precisely the astonishing out of this world and then into this world good news of the gospel.

As the apostle Paul preached in Acts chapter three, you killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. Think about that. The very God who gave us life, made us in his image, who

commanded us to cherish life, he came into the world, but we had gotten so used to taking life, so expert at taking life, that we even crucified the author of life who came to us in the flesh. The one person who perfectly cherished every human life, we rejected, condemned, and killed him. Like Pharaoh, we sacrificed him in order to seek and secure our own kingdoms first above his. But see, while Pharaoh and all the rest of sinful mankind has for almost forever been willing to take and devalue and even sacrifice other people's lives to secure our lesser kingdoms, King Jesus showed us an entirely different kingdom ethic.

[34 : 41] Rather than sacrificing others to preserve himself and build his kingdom, instead, instead of taking life, demanding that we make restitution for all the lives that we've taken into our own hands as if they belong to us and not to him, instead of taking life, instead of taking our lives away from us, like forever, no, this God gave his life in the place of ours on a Roman cross to ransom and redeem, to purchase us back into his family once again in order to give us new life once again, abundant life, eternal life, new creation, resurrection life.

Though the lives he first gave us we took into our own hands and squandered and depreciated, he came once again to give his life on a cross and by his resurrection to give us new life once again, never to be lost and forever to be enjoyed.

And that is the gospel. That which we had taken and could never give back, God has given again in Christ. And what this means for us is that if we belong to the risen Christ, our futures are secure in him and we cannot and will not lose what we did not and could not earn.

So we don't have to spend our lives desperately protecting our own little kingdoms, but we can live and we can give and we can live to give, no longer slaves, but sons with an imperishable inheritance in Christ.

we can live and give in the freedom of knowing that neither our lives nor our neighbor's lives are our own, but God's alone and that that's good news for us and for the world.

[36 : 31] Will you pray with me? Oh Lord, convince us every day that we are not our own, but that we belong body and soul to our precious Savior, Jesus Christ who has freely paid for our sins with his precious blood.

Oh Lord, we have fallen short. The law could never save us, but you in your mercy showed us a grace greater than our sins in Christ.

What we took away, you have given again and again to us in abundance in Christ. So help us to treasure that life, the life you've given us, the life you've given our neighbors, and Lord, make us a witness in the world.

Fill us with your spirit toward that end to be life-giving presences in the name of Jesus. Amen.