

Let God be God - The Sanctity of Life

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Date: 15 February 2015

[0 : 00] I need to begin this morning with some really bad news. And I should probably have put up on the screen viewer discretion advised.

! Not because I'm going to show you anything shocking, that actually these are probably optimistic.

And I think that most conservative sources would unanimously argue that I've painted a very rosy picture compared to the reality. Since 1973, approximately 50 million abortions have taken place.

That number was increasing by about 1.2 million every year until the last two years. Last two years, the news media has been beside themselves in the reduction.

It was about 14%, which means that it's just over 1 million babies per year. That is 3,000 babies each and every day life is taken.

[1 : 21] Just to put that in perspective for you, on 9-11, 3,000 people died. We have an annual celebration or remembrance of that.

I think that's appropriate. We built a \$700 million memorial. I'm not so sure about that one. But 3,000 babies die.

Not once. Not every year. But every single day. Do you know who Brittany Maynard is? Brittany Maynard is a lady that lived in California.

And last year, she moved to Oregon and announced the day of her death. And she died. Not on the day that she originally chose.

She ended up choosing a different one. But by physician-assisted suicide. The article in Time Magazine last November ran the article titled, Brittany Maynard was one of hundreds of people in five states who've taken advantage of death with dignity laws.

[2 : 33] That's the new term. Death with dignity. It's replacing freedom of choice, quality of life, every baby, a wanted baby, etc.

In fact, in Oregon alone, since the law was passed in 1998, 750 people have taken doctor-prescribed lethal doses. The good news of that, if there is such a thing, is that the doctors wrote 1,173 prescriptions for them during those days.

Last October, NBC News ran a story effectively encouraging a change in the laws that would reduce physicians' responsibility and pointing out that in every survey that has been done between 1996 and 2003, in every state of the union, doctors and nurses had admitted to giving directly or indirectly instructions to loved ones that ultimately could have led to death.

In other words, the doctor would say, well, here's the appropriate amount of this prescription that you should give your loved one. And I just want you to know, if you were to give them this much, that would cause instant death.

Do you understand me? I'm leaving now. As of 2015, euthanasia is legal in three countries, Luxembourg, Netherlands, and Belgium.

[4 : 12] And assisted suicide is legal in another five countries, Switzerland, Germany, Albania, Romania, and Japan, and in five states in the United States.

In Belgium, just to take one of those, there have been 1,400 cases of euthanasia take place since the year 2003, or 2002, every year.

In 2013, the last year that they actually have numbers for, it actually increased to 1807. In that year also, the government extended euthanasia to include children that had been declared terminally ill by a doctor.

Enough of the bad news. Would you turn with me to the good news? Genesis chapter 1, verses 26 to 28.

Then God said, Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

[5 : 33] So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

Human life is the creation of God. This passage makes a number of points, but the very first one that I'd like you to see is that human life proceeds from God.

It was a direct act of creation. And that direct act gives him authority over it. It gives him the right to set the boundaries and the rules for it.

The creation account here in Genesis chapter 1, and then restated and kind of expanded in Genesis chapter 2, provides the foundation for the rest of the biblical account. It's the creation of man that sets the stage for God's commandment to him.

Also sets the backdrop for man's fall into sin. It's interesting that it's the foundation that appears to be the key point that Satan uses in Genesis chapter 3, verse 5, to tempt and to challenge man, to draw him into sin.

[6 : 58] That by simply eating this one piece of forbidden fruit, you'll be just like God. You'll no longer be under his instruction.

You'll no longer be under his direction. You can be like God. Creation is the beginning point of the story of man and God and the relationship that God wanted to have.

And it started with his creation. So creation is used throughout Scripture as kind of the starting point to talk about the issue of the gospel, about man and God and our relationship, whether that's in Psalm 19, where the beauty and the goodness of the word of God is set in the context of creation, or whether it's in the New Testament in Acts 17, where Paul, speaking to the intelligentsia of Athens, begins with creation and then presents the good news of Jesus Christ.

R.C. Sproul said, the gift of life comes by his grace and stands under his divine authority. It's interesting that the first sin that is displayed after the fall is the death of another human being as Cain kills his brother Abel.

And it's that action that leads to a path that goes continually downhill until we get to Genesis chapter 6, where God says that man is completely wicked.

[8 : 39] And the earth is filled with violence. The result is that God brings the first weapon of mass destruction.

It's called a flood. And he kills everyone off except Noah and his family and the animals that are there on the ark. After the flood, God repeats the same command to be fruitful and multiply.

But he adds to it that murder will be punished by death. Scripture teaches and treats human life as a divine gift of God and something for which we humans are responsible for preserving and maintaining, not finding more ways to destroy.

God declared that death is to be by his appointment only. In another book in Job chapter 14, Job was written about the same time as the Genesis accounts.

In Job 14, God uses Job to say, since his days are determined and the number of his months is with you, you have appointed the limit that he cannot pass.

[10:00] Job, speaking about man and speaking about God, says that God determines the number of days. He numbers the months. There's a very clear reason why God determines the days and numbers the months.

And that is because humanity is created in the image and likeness of God. According to the passage that we looked at in Genesis chapter 1, here's the point.

Human life is precious because it reflects God's image. That image was determined back in Genesis chapter 1, verse 26.

And it was the standard for creation at that time, and it's the standard of creation even today. It's also the standard for recognizing that God alone has control over life.

Genesis chapter 9, at the end of the flood story, God says, whoever sheds the blood of man by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

[11:04] We don't have time this morning for me to take all of the aspects of the image of God and how those relate to man and some of the abilities and some of the capabilities of man.

man, but I want you to recognize just the big picture, and that's this. The value of man is not related to his capacity or his accomplishments, but rather to the fact that he is an image bearer.

The fact that we have creative abilities, that we have intelligence, that we have communication, that we have the ability to control our environment for our comfort, all of those things are the result of being image bearers, not the cause of it.

And that's very important to recognize. Because it means this. It means that if I never have a unique, independent idea again, if I am so young that I'm unable to control my environment, or if at the beginning or at the end of life I am unable to communicate on even a very basic level, I am still created in the image of God.

And because I'm a human being, and because I'm created in the image of God, I still have value. Human life is not only created by God, but it's sustained by him.

[12:41] I couldn't do the message this morning without asking you to turn with me to my favorite psalm, Psalm 139. Over the last 15 years, I have read this psalm in more hospital rooms than I can remember.

Sometimes I read it to a person or to a family that's hanging on every word for some semblance of hope.

I know of one particular case that I can remember this morning where the nurse said the person hasn't had consciousness consciousness in days.

I don't think they can hear anything you say. And I said, that's okay. We don't know that for sure. And I'm going to read them something. And I read this psalm.

The person never retained consciousness. But I trust the person heard this and was comforted because it was a believer. At one point, the message this morning was going to all be Psalm 139.

[13:47] But I changed that. We're going to spend a lot of time in it. Psalm 139, verses 1 to 12. O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down, when I rise up.

You discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it all together.

You hem me in behind and before and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain it. Where shall I go from your spirit?

Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you're there. If I make my bed in Sheol, you're there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there, your hand shall lead me.

Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me and the light about me be night, even the darkness is not dark to you. The night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

[14 : 58] You can't read or hear that psalm without believing, feeling, the care and the concern that God has for you as an individual.

Here's the bullet point. human life is sustained by God. The language that He searched you speaks of the fact that He knows everything about you.

He knows every sin, not only the ones that you've committed, but the ones that you've contemplated. Not only the ones you've committed, but the ones He's kept you from.

It says that every thought that you've had, every idea that you've had, every word that you were going to speak, God knew it before you even spoke it.

He hems you in all around. He set a hedge about you. There's nothing that has touched you as a human being that God hasn't permitted to touch you.

[16 : 03] whether that is good or whether that's bad. There's no place that I can go from His presence tells me that God is always there.

This passage cries out that God didn't just create man and then walk away and say, well, I hope they figure it out. He continues to watch over His creation every single moment.

Human life is not only the creation of God, but it's also the possession of God. And that means that God gives new lives. Back in our passage in Genesis 1, 26 to 28, I'd like you to notice that God creates life and specifically human life on His own timetable and at His own discretion.

The animals were not all hanging around saying, give us man, give us man. The angels of heaven were not up there like Sunday morning quarterbacks that were saying, I thought He could have done a little better on that one.

You know, why He thought of creating them I have no idea. I used to, my wife used to say she would see a bug, she doesn't like insects, okay?

[17 : 31] She would see a bug and she would say, oh, why does God create that thing? And I said, he's wondering why did God create you? Since sin is the thing that's destroyed everything.

And that was the result of man. verse 28 says that He tells man His first instruction to man is be fruitful and multiply.

And yet, the scriptures after the fall are filled with passages that point to the number, that the number and the timing of children is not something that is always the choice of man.

It's sometimes determined by God. The words of the psalmist Psalm 127 verses 3 and 4, behold, children are a heritage from the Lord.

The fruit of the womb will reward like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blesses the man who fills his quiver with them. But when I read that, I'm reminded of the passage that man makes his plans and God directs his path.

[18 : 42] You know, I don't think this passage necessarily means that every couple should make as many children as they possibly can. But in my years of working with young married couples, I can tell you that this fact of God controlling and giving when he chooses is one of the most hurtful things that couples face.

The pressures, both internally and externally, push couples to question God and to struggle with his goodness and his provision for them.

I mentioned Sarah and Abraham in the list of people that I told you, that I reminded you from Scripture. Sarah and Abraham, because of the pressures and their desire for children, and their desire and their pressures on them were very similar to what couples face today.

Abraham and Sarah chose a path that was not God's best for them by bringing Hagar into the picture. And we have the consequences of that choice in the Middle East today.

Couples today are told, science has your answer. And while appropriate medical knowledge and care is a blessing of our world today, I have to say that I believe the path that kills several lives in order to create one goes too far.

[20 : 25] God allows the timing even when it does not seem to be best. And God has used couples. We mentioned, I mentioned John and Kristen earlier, here is a woman that the timing or the situation that she is having a baby is not best.

John and Kristen are not the first in this congregation to adopt a child. They will not be the last. But human life is so precious that we need to do everything we can to encourage people even when it's not a good time to provide life.

And then, if appropriate, to give that life to someone who would love to take care of it and raise it for the glory of God. Life is something to be preserved even at very high cost.

if you look at the Old Testament, life was so important in Exodus chapter 21. You don't need to turn with it. I'll just remind you of the passage. It says that when two men are fighting and the pregnant wife of one of the men is nearby and the man strikes her and she has the baby, if everything's fine, then this is really interesting, if everything is fine, the baby's okay, then what is supposed to happen is the husband, the father of the baby decides, here's your fine.

It's kind of interesting. But, if the baby dies, the person who caused the accident is to die.

[22 : 18] It's kind of, you know, we live in a kind of a strange and hypocritical world. I say that because our world understands that.

And so, if you find in the news a case where a pregnant woman is killed, they will charge the person with multiple murders. Okay?

Appropriately so. Okay? And at the same time, the same society will say 3,000 babies today is no big deal.

We ought to just all ignore it. Maybe it'll go away. Our society is crazy. Not only at the beginning of life, but also at the other end of life.

So, I've already pointed out, the creation account points to the fact that only God is to determine the length of a life that a person has. Go back to Psalm 139 with me.

[23 : 21] Psalm 139 verses 13 to 16. 139 were written every one of them the days that were formed for me when there was yet none of them.

From the days in the womb to the days at the end of the aged's life, we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Your two large nose, your two small ears, and every other part of you is just like God intended it to be.

And that fact flows right to the end of life. I can't turn to all the pages, all the passages that make it clear that we're to respect and cherish and care for the aged, but I will take the, yeah, why not?

I will have you turn to one of them with me. 1 Samuel chapter 22, verse 3. This is such a fantastic verse in the middle of, you just, whoa, where's that come from?

In the passage, 1 Samuel 22, verse 3, and David went from there to Mizpah of Moab. And he said to the king of Moab, please let my father and my mother stay with you till I know what God will do for me.

[25 : 03] Now, the context of this is important. David is in the midst of being pursued by King Saul. He's just left a place where there were some priests, and King Saul is actually going to go there and destroy those priests.

King Saul is right on his tail. In the midst of his fleeing, David goes to the king of another country, a country that didn't always get along that well with Israel.

He goes to the enemy, if you will. He says, will you take care of my mom and dad? Will you watch over them, keep them safe?

Because it's not safe in my country right now. He took the time out of his escape to care for his aging parents.

If the elderly are to be respected and cherished, and human life is precious because it is the image of God, then here's the point. A life is to end at the timing of God.

[26 : 19] My title this morning was Let God Be God. And so there's a time not to prolong death. Standing in God's way, shaking our fist and screaming, I will not let them go.

Because if God desires that person to have their life in today, he doesn't need our machines to continually and permanently pump the blood and push air into the lungs.

But the person's value as an image bearer of God does not diminish with illness or accident or disease.

So what we must ask, are there still signs of life? Is it still possible that they might recover? Are we providing the basic care?

It's called palliative care. God's way, God. That the individual needs if God sustains their life. Regardless of the cost.

[27 : 33] Regardless of the convenience. Regardless of the emotional stress that it causes us. And then, we let God be God. God not only gives the initial life.

He not only gives the length of days. But God gives the quality of life. I hope you're still in Psalm 139. If you're not, a couple more times.

Psalm 139, verse 17 and 18. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God. How vast is the sum of them. If I would count them, they are more than the sand.

I awake and I'm still with you. The term quality of life is the measure that our society wants to use. And they believe that that means meaning and direction and so forth.

They use it to measure the happiness and the accomplishments of an individual. But when we start with creation. I think that same term, quality of life, is very good.

[28 : 41] Except it means a life that glorifies God and declares his majesty and goodness to the world. It's that fact that brings joy.

Quality of life that cannot be understood by the world. Quality of life means whether one day or a hundred years. We see life as simply a mist.

As James 4 says. So little time to declare his goodness. I want to grow old. Declaring God's goodness.

Not how tired I am. Not how I don't have anything else to accomplish. Not how rough life is. I want to keep declaring how good God is for the rest of my days.

I hope you do too. And then, following James 4. If the Lord wills, we'll do this or that.

[29 : 47] So that if the Lord wills, I'll meet him in glory this afternoon. And if he doesn't, then I'll try to glorify him here on earth with my life.

Psalms 139 verses 19 to 24. Human life redeemed by God. Interesting conclusion to that. Listen to this. Search me, O God. Know my heart. Try me. Know my thoughts.

And see if there's any grievous way in me. And lead me in the way everlasting. The psalmist stood against error.

He stood against wickedness. He stood against godlessness. But he did so by saying, God, search me first.

[31 : 06] He did it with humility. How can we stand in opposition to the world? We do it with humility. I'm going to give you some practical steps.

First, study the word of God for yourself. This is a topic that impacts absolutely every one of you. You will face it on one end of life or the other.

Or both. Know what the word of God says about life. And prayerfully consider what stands you will take.

Where do you draw the lines? Because someone is going to challenge you to pass those lines. Second, I hope every one of you will consider a baby bottle.

Another plug for the baby bottles. I hope every one of you will consider taking one of those baby bottles, putting your change in it, putting a check in it, whatever you believe.

[32 : 09] Fill it with money. Bring it back. Give women a choice that leads to life.

Maybe you say, I can't do that. I can't. I never have change. We never have change. We take a baby bottle and we put a check in it because we never, if we put change in it, it would come back empty. But if you can't do that, there's still things you can do.

You can volunteer. You can give your time. To help Pregnancy Distress Center, to help the Maternity Resource Center up at Emanuel. They would love to have more volunteers.

And you'll get to talk to ladies who are seriously questioning what should they do. Third, if you hear of legislation extending euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, and you will, in our nation or in our state, I hope you'll consider writing to your congressman, signing petitions, and of course, voting, your conscience, and God's principles.

But you know what? None of those things, none of those three things, are really going to change things.

[33 : 35] I think those are valuable things to do. They're valuable list of do goods. But you could have heard that list in a Mormon tabernacle or in a Catholic church this morning.

That's not the answer. And now the answer. Fourth, recognize that only the gospel can change our society.

When we set the truth of the gospel against the backdrop of the information that I started with, it's easy to see just how far off our society has actually gotten.

But at the same time, that same gospel that shows us the despair and the hopelessness of man's lost condition also provides us with the beauty and the hope that comforts our soul.

Last week at lunch, Peggy and I were talking. I was sharing some of the things that I was studying and some of the things that I was going to say today. And I was pleading with her, please pray for me.

[34 : 44] Please pray for me. And as we're talking, she said, you know, our society's becoming like Sodom and Gomorrah. To which without a thought, I said, which would have been saved for ten righteous men.

That leads us to 2 Corinthians 5:21. How do we get ten righteous men? For God made him to be sin who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

What is the answer to our society? The righteousness of God in him. I'm a parent. I'm a grandparent. Sometimes I think, I've got a grandson who was a junior in high school.

Okay? I'm thinking, wow, I could be a great-grandfather. Not that many years away. And I think, is there any hope for this place?

Could anything good come out of this? And I think, yeah, for ten righteous men. The rights that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

[36 : 09] The account in Genesis 1 of the creation that we're created in God's image is all wrapped up in he's got a plan for restoring that image from the brokenness of sin.

First of all, the gospel points us to the despair, the despair, to the hopelessness of man's condition. It points us to Romans 3.23, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Maybe I'm not guilty of some of the things that we thought about this morning in taking a life. But Jesus said, if you hate your brother, you are guilty of murder.

If you call your brother a fool when he cuts you off in traffic, you're guilty. But then the gospel points us to the perfect atonement provided by Jesus Christ.

A passage I got to preach on several months ago or so, or maybe two months ago. John 3.16, for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

[37 : 29] The gospel provides the personal solution of confession and acceptance of the Savior. My personal relationship, the hope I have, Titus 3.5, he saved us not because of the works we have done in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

This good news of the gospel that all of your sins, maybe you're guilty of all of them that we've talked about today. Maybe you're guilty of none of them.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And only salvation through Jesus Christ, the perfect atonement, can care for that.

Is that where you are this morning? If you come to the place of accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, Savior, if you have, all of the sins that you've committed, all of the darkness is covered by the blood of Christ.

Let's pray. Father, I pray that you would work in the hearts of men and women that as we consider the image of God, that we were created from, that we would recognize the need that we have.

[39 : 18] Lord, if there's anyone here this morning that has not come to the place of a personal relationship with you, I pray now, this moment, they would cry out to you and say, I accept that I'm lost, that I'm hopeless, and I accept the atonement of Jesus Christ and trust in the eternal life that I'll have as a result.

Father, those who are here today and know your grace but perhaps are struggling with the areas of life and the sanctity of it and now recognize the importance that this has to you as your image bearers, I pray that you would bring confession and through that forgiveness and a restoration of joy.

Father, I pray that during this year that we are focused on the sanctity of life and doing everything that we can and need to do in our individual lives to show forth the value, the preciousness of the image of God.

I ask it in your name. Amen.