

The importance on life

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[0 : 0 0] The wider organisation in the UK that I'm part of stands for Christian Action Research and Education. You don't need to remember that, cares enough. But we came into being in the early 70s because significant changes were taking place at Parliament in Westminster.

It really was only Westminster at that point. That we're having a massive effect on society, a massive effect on family life, health care and leisure.

And if the direction of government and Parliament and the laws that were changing were impinging upon how we did family life and how we interacted with the NHS, we felt, Christians felt at that time that we needed to do something about that.

And so the influence of the permissive 60s, if some of you remember that, did have a massive effect on what was happening on our politics and therefore education, family life and health care.

And so we really felt that the very special nature of human beings was being threatened to its core. Or the view of what it was to be human was being threatened, was being undermined, in fact.

[1 : 2 6] And so a grand swathe of Christians who gathered in Trafalgar Square on a big march to kind of say, we're really not that happy about the way things are going in Parliament.

We need to find a way of organising ourselves to, at the very least, even if really detrimental laws were passed, at least we had a way of speaking into Parliament to allow our voices to be heard.

And this is how care was born. And so, from early doors, we've tried to provide resources and materials for churches and followers of Jesus to have the information they need to speak into certain things that are being said in Parliament.

And so, as you might imagine, we became essentially a bit like a watchdog originally, keeping an eye on what's being said and what the potential implications for some of those comments would be.

Because what we wanted was for churches and Christians to learn what it was to be salt and light in their speaking into Parliament, in their meeting their MP.

[2 : 4 2] And by helping the church to get across their Christian point of view, or perhaps motivated by their Christian beliefs, get across a point of view, we really wanted to help resource you to be salt and light in your community in that extra way.

Not just in your workplace, or in your home, or in your schooling, or in your college, but also in the way you interacted with your elected representative. But we fundamentally needed another way of doing this.

So, yes, we need the church to do this, we need individual Christians to do this, but we needed to have another way of getting in on the inside to try and be a Christian influence.

And so, we began to develop relationships with MPs and MSPs, once the Scottish Parliament came back into being in 1999, to influence matters.

So, on a daily basis, we have a parliamentary officer at Holyrood, meeting MSPs, meeting their civil servants and staff, to try and convince them that we have a better story to tell, a better way of looking at certain social causes than maybe the general trend would be.

[4 : 18] His name is Michael. He's fantastic. In fact, I understand that 16 years ago, he stood in this church building. You've maybe met Michael Veach.

He was a councillor in East Lothian for a while, and convinced somebody that is now a councillor, a city councillor, in Edinburgh City Council, who was a policeman until that point, to stand to get elected, and he did get elected, and is still one of your city councillors today.

So, Michael Veach is there in Holyrood, or sometimes on Zoom, convincing our MSPs to listen to a Christian perspective on certain social causes every day of the week.

He writes speeches sometimes for MSPs, Christian MSPs, sometimes not Christian MSPs, but who share similar values on certain issues. We write robust research for them as they seek to grapple with a new way of looking at things.

Because we are actually trying to change their minds on things. We are trying to show them that not everybody views certain social causes the way the internet news or the physical newspaper tries to get across.

[5 : 34] But even further than getting churches involved and being at the coalface ourselves, we needed, we felt, yet another way of trying to influence a salt and light of Jesus in our political life.

We felt like those first two things maybe weren't even all the way to what we needed to do. And this is when we set up the leadership programme, which is where we take a dozen university graduates and place them with MPs in Westminster and with MSPs in Edinburgh every year to learn the craft of what it means to be a follower of Jesus in the world of politics.

This is a paid internship scheme. And those that get selected, the small number that gets selected, get to choose a party which is closest to their preference to work with for the year.

And spend four days a week in Edinburgh working in that office, doing research, speaking with constituents, handling emails, doing case work, answering calls.

And then every Friday go to London and everyone gets together to do some biblical theology, some biblical work on what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus in this sector of society.

[7 : 00] What will help us stay in it in the long haul? What does servant leadership look like? What is our Christian heritage and being in the world of politics?

And so, inevitably, these people do get kept on and remain in the background, sometimes prominently.

Kate Forbes, for example, was somebody who did that programme a few years ago and she's now in the highest echelons of government. But today I want to tell you about a pressing matter.

The MSP for the Orkney Islands has proposed a new assisted suicide bill. Some of you will be aware of that. It's called the Assisted Dying Bill for Terminally Ill Adults.

Scotland Bill. You don't need to remember that. And you may think that such a title is benign, but this is a bill that seeks to legalise doctors to prematurely end human lives.

[8 : 06] And whether these folks know it or not, this is a deliberate move to cut short human life. Something that's given to us by God.

A crossing of the Rubicon. So, what is that? Well, physician-assisted suicide is when a doctor indirectly performs a lethal act, assisting a patient to terminate their own life.

They provide medication, lethal medication, for a patient to swallow. And when that fails, the doctor administers a lethal injection.

Our 129 parliamentarians are genuinely considering whether to legalise assisted suicide, state-assisted suicide, which, if it passes, suicide would be an instrument of the state.

And all this would be performed in the name of compassion, and, in some cases, by GPs. But the term compassion literally means to suffer with someone.

[9 : 26] And suffering with another person is not what is envisaged here. And so, I want to encourage you this morning.

You may have walked past these on the way in. Loads of these packs. These are our Scottish packs. Please take one home with you. There's loads of things in it. But the thing I would love to point you towards is the letter on the inside, which has a link to our campaign page, which will help you respond to the public consultation on this, and give you a crib sheet, some guides as to how to fill that out.

Now, some of you will not be into the internet. I get that. So, what I've done is I've printed off hard copies for those of you who prefer to mail in a physical copy. And that supporter guide is here on the front, these first two pages.

Now, if you do take this, this physical copy, please don't send in the supporter guide at the front. Just take that off and fill in the rest of the sheets. That would be super useful.

And, of course, if you are keen to hear more about what we do and want to get involved in our campaigns and get more information and know how to pray and just be kept up to date with some key issues, you can sign up as well.

[10 : 46] These sheets are out there. They're COVID-safe pens in a fresh box, which I've burst open for you this morning. So, thanks so much for that so far, and I look forward to sharing with you from Scripture in a short while.

Thank you. Imagine your family were the only human family left on the planet.

Imagine the great flood has just subsided and you walk down the gangplank onto the sodden turf of Ararat.

Imagine that as you take each step down that mountain, you hear the voice of God reinstitute his mandate to you to develop the earth.

Well, let's hear from Scripture this morning. Let's read from Genesis chapter 9. I want to read from the beginning of that chapter to you. Genesis chapter 9.

[12 : 08] We'll read the first 13 verses. God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea.

Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

For your own life blood, I will surely require a reckoning. From every animal, I will require it. And from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life.

Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed. For in his own image, God made humankind. And you, be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it.

[13 : 27] Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, As for me, I'm establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that is with you.

The birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood.

And never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth. God said, God said, This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you for all future generations.

I have set my bow in the clouds and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

God's booming voice declares to Noah and his sons, Get out there.

[14 : 30] Get out there and do what I asked Adam and Eve to do. You're only the second lot I've ever asked to do this. Go and shape and reshape this earth responsibly.

And this is God's declaration. That each human life carries his image into the earth after the flood.

And that despite the fact that sin has entered into creation. That God's image has not been lost in human beings even though sin has entered the picture.

Each life in God's eyes is sacrosanct. In this ninth chapter of Genesis we discover something which you don't need to remember.

This technical phrase is called the *lex talionis*. It's a fancy word. It's actually one of the oldest legal formulae in world literature.

[15 : 46] And it's from verse 6 of our passage. It's known as the *lex talionis* to some people. And it describes the death penalty for the crime of shedding another human being's blood.

So let's remind ourselves of verse 6. Whoever sheds the blood of a human by a human shall that person's blood be shed for in his own image God made humankind.

You see, to destroy human life is uniquely scandalous because it desecrates God's image in each one of us.

God's masterpiece in you and me. Yes! Human beings are just that special.

The song we just sang prior to this was on the money about that. And this is even the case for those who are weak.

[16 : 53] In fact, those who are weak are worthy of special protection precisely because they are vulnerable.

And the strong as a consequence in a Christian world view have a duty to protect the weak from manipulation and abuse.

wonder, respect, empathy, and protection. These are the hallmarks of followers of Jesus as they act in the world towards others.

And because we're constantly reminded by Scripture that we are God's mirror in the world, and because each of us is created in the image of the Trinity, we must treat one another with the utmost care because housed within each one of us are the fingerprints of God.

You're worth that much. You're worth that much. And yet, not so distant in the memory of Noah and his family was the haunting story of their relative Cain who took his own brother's life.

[18 : 34] Genesis 9 verse 6, this important bit of legislation was put in place to ward off anybody from imitating Cain's fratricide.

And you can sense the darkness of that moment if you go back to it. And I went back to it again this week and went through the passage again slowly when immediately after Cain has done that deed that he presses Cain about the whereabouts of his brother.

And the sense of dread in Cain's response makes it all the more sinister. And so God explains to Cain that Abel's blood is crying out to me from the ground.

That act you've done is such that his blood is crying out to me from the ground. This is why Genesis 9 verse 6 was given to Noah.

This is the result of killing another human being. And again God's message in Genesis verse Genesis 9 verse 6 to Noah is to ward off anybody from repeating the sort of pre-flood madness.

[19 : 57] I don't know about you I've just got this really vivid picture from a kid's story book about the life of Noah and the revelry and the dissipation and the kind of permissive lifestyle I was talking about earlier from the 60s and 70s of our world that that's what was happening in Noah's world too.

Remember what it was like then it actually says that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. Wow. That's from chapter 6 verse 5.

But back to our passage so grave is the taking of life of another that God has instituted that he would require the killer's life in return.

He's put a red marker down for Noah he's put a red marker down for us too.

This red line is still live and active for us today because it is that sinister to terminate an image bearer of God in the world.

[21 : 24] That's how serious a matter it is. And of course God cements this idea down further he concretizes it by including it in the Ten Commandments right? And so now this marker is seared quite deeply in the memory banks of God's people that we ought not to kill people anyone for any reason doesn't matter how annoying they are or how angry you are at them.

And this commandment actually must have caused Moses a serious amount of pain as he himself was a murderer. Remember? But this is the way that the Lord has set up human relationships to be peaceful, harmonious, and it is up to us today as a fresh generation to live that out.

In order to truly flourish and live as human beings, we need to recognize God's reflection in everyone we see.

we've got to really tap into that. Because if we begin to see people as other or different from us in some sort of superior fashion, that is when we turn the dark corner.

Because when somebody is other or different from us, we start to see them as less than us and start to justify poor behavior towards them.

[23 : 23] We do this all the time actually. You're rich, I'm poor. You're nationalist, he's a unionist.

Nicola Boris, hearts, hips, woman, man. We've got loads of versions of this, don't we? And we use that as a way to say, you're other than me.

You're different from me. And the minute we start even thinking that way, we forget that other person is God's reflection in the world too.

people are too. But there are other ones we can add. That person's getting old. That person's old. That's a pejorative comment.

That person's body's failing them. losing their memory a wee bit. They're not all there anymore. That person's a burden on their family or a burden on state resources.

[24 : 37] Jesus. Why do I bring this message of Noah to you today? Because Scotland is at the brink of an enormous decision.

This assisted dying for terminally ill adults Scotland bill will cause the premature ending of life.

And as we've seen in neighbouring countries in Europe, it comes through in a seemingly benevolent people in extreme circumstances. And within months or a year, all the safeguards are knocked down by Parliament and the courts.

And we're finding any reason under the sun to get either rid of ourselves or one another. Do you know, seldom is a person untouched by a suffering loved one these days, right?

I think it's maybe always been thus. And there's no question at all that it is immensely difficult to care for a suffering loved one who's losing their capacity, their memory, maybe even in pain as well.

[26 : 08] And that's nothing to say of how those people are feeling within themselves, in their own bodies. And such is people's agony that sometimes followers of Jesus do wonder very deeply, should we find a legal way to help them end it all?

But this is when we return to Genesis 9, verse 6. This Rubicon, this red line, this announcement to Noah, which is still live and in play in creational life today.

we come right up to the brink and God reminds us, no, this is not how we interact with others who reflect me in the world, just like you reflect me in the world.

This is when Genesis 9, verse 6 reminds us of the limitations of how we should be acting in this world towards one another. This idea was developed a bit later on in Scripture as well.

We read this in Psalm 104 about how human beings have been put together by God. So let me read to you a couple of verses from Psalm 104. The first one is verse 23.

[27 : 37] People go out to their work and to their labor until the evening, says God. And then verse 29, the psalmist says about God, when you hide your face, God, they are dismayed.

When you take away their breath, when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.

Psalm 104 verse 29. the way the Lord has put together human beings is the dust of the earth, which is pretty hard this morning in Edinburgh, enlivened with his breath, his spirit.

We are uniquely put together by him. God's and it is his role and his role alone to determine when we cease to exist in this age.

Not us. Not for humans to overreach themselves and assume God's role. soul, we are not the ones that take away God's breath from other human beings.

[29 : 06] To even assume that we could or that we should take the life of another is to arrogantly take the place of God. That's not a Christian ethic for this world, for this country, in this time, and it never has been.

Genesis 9, verse 6 shows us that to end the life of another human is beyond the pale. It's beyond the pale.

And Psalm 104 shows us who the rightful Lord over life, over human life, and human death is.

And this is really instructive for us in our Scottish secular society that is bent on making ourselves God and King over all decisions.

My rights, it's my life, I'll do whatever I want, says the voice of now. But it is imperative that our compulsion to try and end human lives through assisted suicide be met with impermeable restraint.

[30 : 32] because to terminate the life of another human being by assisted suicide is to prematurely end something extraordinarily special.

But not just something, someone. Someone who is a being that mirrors God himself.

That's the second thing I would love to ask of you this morning. See, when you go home today, I want you at one point to look in the mirror, don't know where your mirrors are, and you tell yourself out loud, Lord, I am your reflection in the world.

I am. It's not a very Scottish psyche thing to do, is it? One, to say that in a mirror, but two, to really believe it. But it's true.

You are God's mirror to the world. That's what Genesis 9, verse 6, today highlights, reminds us again of.

[31 : 52] Remember Psalm, verse 8, where the psalmist says, a little that we were created a little lower than the heavenly beings, and that God has crowned us with glory and honor.

And this is after the fall. That's how esteemed we are as beings before God. The God of creation and redemption, perception.

So we do need to take a breath and think for a minute, very carefully, about how best to respond to Mr.

MacArthur of the Orkney Islands, MSP. A nice guy, really nice guy, who himself reflects God in the world, whether he knows it or not.

we must find a way of convincing him that protecting life at its end stages, even if it's human life whilst it's struggling in its frailty or its pain, is still worth living.

[33 : 04] we need to find a way of showing him the worth of human beings. Can you help us do that this week?

There's only three and a half weeks left with this public consultation to get our view across. Take a pack home.

Take the printed off version home. Mail it in. Fill out the consultation online. Make sure your tone is warm and winsome so that they will hear what we're saying.

This is a very public way of us being salt and light in our world of understanding and putting it in print that we think everybody else, everybody else in our society is a reflection of God himself and therefore worthy of special protection.

God will be the beginning of life, the beginning of our lives was not in our hands, right? Nor should the end of our lives be either.

[34 : 38] Intentionally destroying human life is a great evil. God So let's conclude this lesson from scripture by rereading what I've already mentioned numerous times.

Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed. For in his own image, God made humankind.

kind, let's never forget the worth of God's image bearers and that means you.

Let's pray. Father, these are difficult matters.

This is a worrisome bill that is proposed in and for our country's NHS. Father, if I can just ask two things this morning.

[35 : 59] Bed deep within us the belief that we ourselves and everyone else we meet or don't have the chance to meet reflect you or your mirror in the world whether they wish to or know about it or not.

But secondly, Lord, very simply, have mercy on us, Lord. Don't give us what we deserve. Will you help this bill fall?

We look to you, Lord. Maybe you might even use us, Lord, to be salt and light in this process. Thank you for honoring us, bestowing and creating us out of nothing with this much honor.

we owe you everything as the children's song conveys. Help us give up everything for you, Lord. Thank you in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen.

[37 : 19] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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