

The Sanctity of Human Life 2013

Just Do Something! * Proverbs 24:11-12

Let me share something interesting with you about Troy's testimony. Two weeks ago right before the message we showed a video about the sanctity of human life by mistake. There was another video that was supposed to be played, with the sanctity of life video saved for today. And as I sat over there in my pew I was stewing a little bit (yes, it's a problem I am working on) and as the video played Eva reached over, patted my arm and said, "Maybe God has a reason for this." Well, I didn't really agree but I went ahead and played it off and preached the message, quite ironically on repentance. Well, anyways, I had been hoping for a testimony for today and so after the service Troy came up to me and shared his story, which lead to him being able to share it with you. So, this affirmed two important things for me. One, God is sovereign, and two, I should always listen to my wife.

All right, as you have probably guessed, this morning we are taking a pause in our Matthew series to address the issue of the sanctity of human life. I think you know by now that my normal and preferred method of preaching is to systematically work through a book of Scripture. And Lord willing, we will get back to that in Matthew 4 next week. However, I do believe there are times when we need to shed Biblical light on specific issues of our day, and that is nowhere more the case than with the matter of the sanctity of human life.

So, please take your Bibles and turn with me to Proverbs 24. And as you turn, let me give a few introductory comments. First, I want to make it clear that this message is primarily about the sanctity of *all* human life, regardless of age, sex, race, or physical or mental development. While I will spend some time specifically addressing abortion, this message has implications for much more than just that issue.

Second, my primary goal today is to call you to action. As Troy and I spoke two weeks ago, he said something that I will never forget. In his passion to see God's people serving, he said, "We can't save the pews!" And he is right. We can't save the pews, but we can save human lives. Therefore, the title of this message is "Just Do Something!" and I hope everyone in this room will leave today with the intention of getting involved in the fight for life.

Now, this being said, I want to begin by reminding you of why human life is sacred. In last years' message I spent an extended amount of time on this point, so if you want a more detailed teaching about it we have copies available at Harmony Central or online at harmonybiblechurch.org.

Human life is sacred because all humans are made in the image of God.

To summarize why human life is sacred, we can say that human life is sacred because all humans are made in the image of God. This is clear right from the very first chapter of the Bible, Genesis 1. In verse 27, Moses records this:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27 ESV)

The word *image* here refers to something that is similar, but not identical to, the thing it is like or is an image of. In other words, God made us to be like Him and to represent Him. This doesn't mean that we are gods, but rather that we have God's likeness stamped upon us and He has chosen us to represent Him before the rest of creation. This is what gives us our value. This is what makes us significant and important. And this is why God tells Noah later on in Genesis that it is wrong to take human life. Genesis 9:6:

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. Genesis 9:6 (ESV)

God makes it clear to Noah that an attack on human life is an attack on God Himself. Therefore, because God has value, those who are made in His image have value.

Perhaps an illustration will be helpful. Imagine taking a friend from another country, one that knows nothing of U.S. history, to the Mount Vernon estate in Virginia. It is likely that your friend would not understand why the home is a national monument and treated as an object of such great worth. There are actually many nicer, larger, and more beautiful homes around Mount Vernon that are not considered nearly as valuable. They would only understand why Mount Vernon is so valuable if you explained to them that it was the house of George Washington, the founder of our country. Then they would get it. You see it is not the merits of the house that make it valuable. It's the value of the one who owned it. And because we value the owner and think highly of him, we value the house. In the same way, we value every human life as a way to show how much we value its Creator.¹ To not value human life is to not value God himself.

Now, let me emphasize something else about the sanctity of human life. We should value every life equally. Two important words here – *every* and *equally*. No one life is

¹ Keller, Timothy J. Pg. 84. (2013) *Generous Justice, How God's Grace Makes us Just*. Kindle Edition. Hodder & Stoughton.

more valuable than another. This is regardless of age – whether a day old in a mother’s womb or 110 years. It is regardless of sex, whether male or female. It is regardless of race – red, yellow, black and white, all are precious in His sight. And it is regardless of physical, mental, or moral limitations, which because of sin we all have to some degree. The Bible teaches that life begins at conception and that God alone should determine when it ends.

Ok, there is one more thing I would like to discuss before we get to our primary text, and that is current battlefronts in the fight for life. While my primary goal this morning is to call you to action, one of my secondary goals is to educate you on how the sanctity of life is being demeaned in our world today. This being the case, let me share with you three primary areas where the sanctity of human life is being attacked.

Battlefronts in the Fight for the Sanctity of Life

1. Abortion

First, let’s talk about abortion. You simply can’t talk about the sanctity of human life without addressing this issue. This Tuesday will mark the 40th anniversary of the legalization of abortion in the United States. During this time, over 50 million children have been legally aborted in our country. Let that number sink in just a little bit. 50 million. This means that every year in our country over 1 million children are legally murdered, on an average of one every 30 seconds.

On a positive note, there are many encouraging signs in the fight for life, as a recent cover story in *Time* magazine makes clear. And while I think the story over exaggerates the case, it does appear as if the tide in our culture regarding abortion has turned, and for that we can be very thankful.

That said, there is still a great deal of work to be done. There are still many children that need to be saved. In fact, just this last week, *Planned Parenthood*, the leading provider of abortions in our country, announced proudly that they performed a record 333,964 abortions in 2011.² By the way, this was done with over a half billion dollars in taxpayer-provided funds. Those are your dollars, my friends, which are going to pay for the murder of unborn babies.

Now, lest we think that abortion is only an assault on the unborn, we need to realize that the damage is much further reaching. As John Piper says:

² <http://washingtonexaminer.com/planned-parenthood-reports-record-year-for-abortion/article/2517801#.UOuEmaWX-CJ>

*Abortion is morally outrageous: fatal for children, damaging to women, corrupting to men, debasing to culture, mangling to human reason and language, and an assault on Jesus Christ, through whom all things are made.*³

I agree with Piper and believe that the greatest tragedy of my lifetime is the fact that abortion has become so commonplace in our country that we have become numb to its horrific nature and results. How is it that we are not outraged that in the United States of America in 2013 over one million babies will be legally pulled to pieces in their mother's womb?

My friends, this issue affects every single one of us, whether we realize it or not. And so the question for us on Sanctity of Human Life Sunday is *what are we going to do about it?*

Now, before we move on to the second battlefield, because of the pervasiveness of abortion in our culture I feel the need to say a word to those in our congregation who have participated in it. This would include women who have had one, men who have encouraged one, and parents who have paid for one. To you I say there is no sin that the blood of Christ cannot cover. As we saw last week in Matthew 3, if you have repented of your sin and turned to faith in Jesus Christ, God has washed your sin away and says to you, "You are my beloved son or daughter in whom I am well pleased." You need to know brothers and sisters that God does not condemn you and therefore neither do we here at Harmony Bible Church. I don't do this often, but can I get an *amen* on this point? And I pray and hope that this will ring true to you today and free you from the guilt you feel for choices you have made in the past.

2. Children in Crisis

A second major battlefield in the fight for the sanctity of life is what I will call children in crisis. I am quite sure that some of our children's ministers will report after the service that there was a crisis or two in Harmony Acres this morning. But that is not the kind of crisis I am referring to. I am referring to the billions of children in our world whose lives are in grave danger at this very moment.

This would include the estimated 210 million orphans in the world today. Did you get that? 210 million.

This would include the 500,000 children in foster care in the United States (5,000 of those in Iowa).

This would include the 3,000 children who die each day around the world from a lack

³ <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-darkness-of-abortion-and-the-light-of-truth>

of clean drinking water and proper sanitation.

This would include the hundreds of millions of children living in poverty and without access to basic necessities which every single child in our church has readily available to them.

Now, there are many more statistics I could share, but the point is that a majority of the children alive today are in peril in one way or another. And so I want to ask again, what are we going to do about it?

3. Human Trafficking

The third and final battlefield I will mention is human trafficking, an issue that isn't likely on the radar screen for most of us. However, it is a major issue of our day and the fastest-growing criminal industry in the world. Human trafficking is defined as the recruitment, transportation, harboring, or taking of people by means of threat, force, coercion, abduction, fraud, or deception for the purpose of exploiting them.⁴

The U.S. State Department estimates over 12 million people are currently being trafficked around the world and that it brings in an estimated \$32 billion dollars annually, with almost \$10 billion of this here in the United States.⁵

One of the most profitable forms of trafficking is sex trafficking and involves many kinds of sexual exploitation, such as prostitution, pornography, bride trafficking, and the commercial sexual abuse of children. The Department of Justice estimates that more than 250,000 American children are at risk for trafficking into the sex industry annually.⁶

In just a few weeks most of us will attend Super Bowl parties in the comfort of big homes with big TV's and big spreads of food. It's an American tradition. And there is nothing wrong with that. I will do it myself. But we need to realize that while we party there will be more than 10,000 women and children trafficked into Miami for this event. I won't go into the details of why, because I think you can figure it out.

To bring this a little closer to home, the I-80 truck stop, just about 90 minutes north in Walcott, IA is reported to be the largest truck stop in the world. Most of us have either stopped or driven past it at some point. What you may not realize is that it is one of the major sites in the US for transporting and purchasing victims of trafficking, and that more prostitution happens at this location in a twenty four-hour period than in Las

⁴ <http://theresurgence.com/2012/01/11/human-trafficking-recommended-reading>

⁵ <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/142980.pdf>

⁶ <http://abcnews.go.com/US/domestic-sex-trafficking-increasing-united-states/story?id=10557194>

Vegas or Atlantic City. It is estimated that at any time there are more than 200 prostitutes working there, many of them by force.⁷ I am not making this up. This is occurring right here in good old Iowa. And so I will pose to you yet again, what are we going to do about it?

What Does God Want Us To Do?

Now, all of that said, before we determine what we are or are not going to do, we should probably ask, what does God want us to do? Or does God want us to do anything at all? Because that is what really matters, isn't it? And you know what, I think the answer is pretty simple. I think God just wants us to do something. But I don't just want to tell you this. I want to show it to you. So, take a look with me now at Proverbs 24, specifically verses 11-12:

Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. [12] If you say, "Behold, we did not know this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work? (Proverbs 24:11-12 ESV)

There are three things that I want us to see in this text today.

1. God calls us to rescue those who are suffering injustice.

First, God calls us to rescue those who are suffering injustice. The word "rescue", in verse 11, means to *deliver* or *snatch*. The picture is of someone who needs to be rescued because they are going down a path that puts them in mortal danger, whether by choice, disease, hunger, war, or some other form of oppression.⁸ The author does not say exactly what the situation is, because he is giving guidelines for what it means to follow the Lord in the day-to-day of life. The Proverbs are all about what it means to live in the fear the Lord. So, the author is not being specific, because he knows that if he is it will give us wiggle room. He wants us to understand that regardless of why they are in the situation, we are called to rescue those who are perishing.

Now, because these verses are in Proverbs you might think that this isn't a command but rather a suggestion. In fact, those of you who have studied Proverbs might be inclined to argue that this is wisdom literature rather than a specific command for how God wants us to live. That being the case, I'd like to give you a flavor for how the rest of the Bible addresses the issue of injustice. Let's take a look at some passages from

⁷ <http://stevedeace.com/news/iowa-politics/21st-century-slavery-precious-cargo/>

⁸ Allen P. Ross. Pg. 1075. (1991) *Expositor's, Bible Commentary, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.

both the Old and New Testaments. I am actually not going to comment on any of these because I think that they quite naturally speak for themselves:

Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. [4] Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked. (Psalm 82:3-4 ESV)

Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. (Isaiah 1:17 ESV)

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? [7] Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? (Isaiah 58:6-7 ESV)

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8 ESV)

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (James 1:27 ESV)

[Jesus] said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. [13] But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, [14] and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just." (Luke 14:12-14 ESV)

And I could go on and on, but in summary, I have listed on the screen some of the approximately 300 verses in the Bible that have to do with how God desires His people to respond to injustice in the world. To put it simply, this is something that is apparently very important to the Lord. When God's people see injustice, He desires for them to do something about it.

2. Our deeds reveal the condition of our hearts.

All right, back to our text. The second thing we need to see in Proverbs 24 is that our deeds reveal the condition of our hearts. Look at verse 12 again:

If you say, "Behold, we did not know this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?

After making the statement in verse 11, the author anticipates that some will plead ignorance. He is sure that some will claim they didn't act because they didn't know they were supposed to or didn't know that injustice was taking place. But the author will have none of this. He says that God knows the heart and He will hold us accountable. In fact, that is essentially what the phrase *keep watch* means – that God knows what is really going on in our hearts and watches over us to keep us accountable.

Listen folks, we can fool others and we can fool ourselves, but we cannot fool God. It's very easy for us in our nice comfortable homes, and our nice comfortable church, and our nice comfortable communities to ignore the pain and suffering in the world and to act as if we are unaware of what is going on and what God calls us to do about it. But the plain fact of the matter is that God knows and He will hold us accountable.

Let me explain the danger here. It is very possible to be blissfully ignorant of the pain and hurt in our world, and even more so to the fact that God has called us to do something about it. I know it's possible because for a good portion of my life, even a good portion of my life as a pastor, this was me. Yes, I gave verbal assent to the fact that there was a lot of injustice in the world, and yes, I agreed mentally that God wanted me to do something about it, but it took me a long time to understand how much injustice was occurring and how much God desired for me to do something about it. And it took even longer for me to actually get involved in doing something about it. To be honest, in retrospect I think that I viewed it as an optional part of the Christian life. That it really was a choice that I could make. That if I got involved it was good, but if I didn't God was ok with that. That I could go along in the Christian life and not display the heart that God has for those who are suffering injustice.

The problem is that Scripture tells us our response to injustice reveals the condition of our hearts. That's actually what the proverb is implying when it says that God *will repay man according to his work*. It's not that our response to injustice determines whether or not we are saved, but rather it shows whether or not that is the case. Note what James 2 says:

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? [15] If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, [16] and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? [17] So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (James 2:14-17 ESV)

You see, we are saved by faith alone, but faith that saves is never alone. True saving faith doesn't allow us to look at injustice with indifference. It doesn't allow us to ignore the pain and hurt in our world. True saving faith sees injustice and does something about it.

3. We rescue because we have been rescued.

Now, let me bring out one more point this morning that will hopefully tie all of this together. The third thing I want you to see from our text is that we rescue because we have been rescued.

I want to be clear that ministering to those who are suffering injustice does not save us. There are millions of people around the world who volunteer their time, give large sums of money, and serve the hurting and needy but do not know Jesus Christ as their Savior. Take Lance Armstrong for example. He has given millions to charity through Livestrong. However, I am pretty sure that perhaps other than Oprah no one believes that he is saved.

Here at Harmony Bible Church we affirm that salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone. So, don't get the idea that I am saying you have to do something in order to be saved, or that because you do something you are saved. What I am saying, and what our text is saying, is that those who have been rescued will seek to rescue others. And you just absolutely have to get this.

The first and foremost truth that we must grasp from this text is that at one time we were the ones who were being taken away to death. Look at verse 11 and see for yourself. We were those who were stumbling to the slaughter. We were dead in our trespasses and sin and on our way to hell. Note what Romans 5 says:

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. (Romans 5:6 ESV)

Now, this is a hard pill to swallow, especially for the men in the room, but the truth of the matter is that at one time all of us were weak. We were outcasts. We were impoverished. But at just the right time Christ died for us. He saw our need and came to our rescue. He didn't ignore our circumstances. He didn't claim that He was ignorant of the fact. He didn't say that He was too busy. He didn't stay in the comfort of heaven. He saw our situation and decided to do something about it.

And I have to tell you that until you understand where you were – how bad off you actually were – and therefore how much Jesus Christ has rescued you from, you will never understand the need to get involved in rescuing those who are weak as you

once were. You will look at the injustice in our world and hardly bat an eye. And if that is where you find yourself this morning, you need to be worried. You need to tremble a little bit. You need to ask yourself what is going on. Because if you truly do know what Christ has done for you, there is no way you cannot act to help those who were in the same place you once were.

I have said repeatedly throughout this message that the point is for you to just do something. Hopefully you have gotten that. But you know what the most important thing is for you to do? To come to a realization that you were once headed toward slaughter and that Christ rescued you. Because once you understand this, you won't be able to resist getting involved in rescuing others.

I'd like to close by telling you a little more of the story about how my family got into this adoption thing. If you haven't already heard, we are in the process of adopting two children from China. In fact, our last paperwork was sent off on Friday and we should be headed over to get them soon. Now, I haven't shared a whole lot about this for a number of reasons, primarily because I don't want to draw any undue attention to us. There are many families in our church who have and/or are adopting and there is nothing extra special about us. But I will share a little bit here to hopefully bring home an important point.

I recognize that there are some people who look at our circumstances – 40 years old, four children, significant health issues, just relocated, pastoring a church – and our decision to adopt 2 special needs children doesn't make sense to them. They scratch their heads and wonder what we are thinking. Now, no one has said this to me, but I know that this is what some people think. And to be honest with you, some days it doesn't make a lot of sense to me either. But here is what I know. Last February 29th I was sitting in my office across the street when I saw a post on Facebook from a friend who was at an orphanage in China picking up his son to bring him home. On his post there was a picture of this little girl from the orphanage with a message that stated, "if she doesn't get a family soon she will die." That was my *rescue those who are headed to slaughter* moment. Coincidentally, Eva saw the post at about the same time. And although we hadn't talked, when I walked in the door a few hours later, we both said at the same time, "we have to adopt her." Now, you might think it was an emotional response, and to some degree you would be right. But at the very heart of it for both of us was a work of the Holy Spirit simultaneously telling us that because we had been rescued by God we needed to rescue this little girl. Listen, this doesn't make us special. Don't give us credit. However, this little girl, and her soon to be brother are special because they are made in the image of God. And what God did for us through his Son is incredibly special. And to be honest with you, in light of these two truths the only

natural response was to obediently move forward and do for these kids what God has done for us. There really wasn't another option.

And you know what, it is going to be great. One day I confidently believe I will say it was one of the greatest privileges of my life. I can say that because I have learned that there is no greater joy than being used by God to accomplish His purposes here on the earth. You see, responding to what He has done in our lives isn't drudgery; it's joy. I have to tell you that most of us have way too comfortable, boring lives. We do the same things every day, over and over again, never venturing out to see what is going on and what God wants us to do about it. But friends, this is where the action is. This is where the fun is. This is where the joy is. Yes, there is a lot of pain. Yes, there is a lot of hurt. Yes it is hard. But yes, this is where life is found. And this is where we have the opportunity to give back to God just a little bit of what He has given to us. Church, we can't save the pews, so, let's get out there and just do something!

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