

Value of human life

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[0 : 00] 9 and verses 13 and 14. For you created my inmost being.

You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. I know that full well.

Especially the words at the beginning of verse 14. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Now this morning, as I mentioned, we are due to have the sacrament of baptism at the close of this service.

Now that raises important questions. It raises, first of all, the question of the rightness or the appropriateness of the baptism of children.

Now that's something that I preached about before. And it's also something I'm going to mention later on today as we come to the baptism itself. It's a very important question.

[1 : 05] This also raises the important question of family life. And again, that is a tremendously important question. Which I've dealt with on previous occasions.

But there is another important issue raised in our minds by the baptism of children. We are reminded of the incredible value of the life of a child.

Today we all, I'm sure, rejoice together with those who are bringing their children forward for baptism. Rejoicing with them because of the birth of their children.

And not only with them, but all whom we know have recently had children. It's something surely common to all human experience and human society. That we want to be happy for them and to be happy with them.

At the entry of a new life into the world. And perhaps that is the thought that is uppermost in the minds of most people at a service of baptism.

[2 : 11] Maybe all the theological questions and debatable points and so on, they don't occupy people's minds very much. And the important thing that people think about is that he is a new child who is being brought in some way or another into the body of the church.

Now that's probably shown to be true by the fact that other churches who don't have the same view of baptism as we do, such as Baptist churches. Many of them today will have a service of dedication for the children of members of the church.

In other words, it's a recognition of the importance of this new life that God has given. And it is being celebrated in some way or other. Now in this cynical and technological age, the birth of a child still remains a marvellous thing.

And some of the issues connected with that is what I want to examine with you today. What the Bible teaches about the value and significance of a human being from the very beginning of life.

Now I believe this is necessary today because of the tremendous pressures that are exerted on what we may call the traditional Christian view that has been accepted in our society for centuries concerning these matters.

[3 : 41] Now I'm not here just referring to things like the alarming growth in child abuse and violence to children. Though I believe these things are not unrelated to what I am going to be talking about.

Because once the status of any kind of children is lowered in society, then this leads to inevitable results in the attitude of society at large to children.

I wonder if our lawmakers are really so naive that they think that they can give permission to doctors working in a hospital to end the life of unborn children.

And that that will have no effect upon the attitude of society at large to children in general. I think it is incredibly naive that such a view could be held.

Because there is something instinctive in the human mind that connects the fate of babies who are unborn also with the attitude that we have to children after birth.

[5 : 01] Things are so badly amiss in our society that large sections of the Christian church are either simply echoing the ideas of the world about these issues, or they are totally confused, or they are numbed into silence and inaction by the complexity of the issues that confront us in these areas.

But I think, by and large, we fail to understand that in this issue, as in many other issues, there are two competing ideologies.

Battling for the minds of human beings, battling for control of societies, battling for the soul of nations.

And these two ideologies are what I call personalism and impersonalism. By personalism, I mean, as we'll see, basically the Christian worldview, that there is a personal God who created the world and is in control of it.

But you see, there is another worldview, or we may say a whole collection of worldviews, that don't hold that idea. That are what I call impersonalism.

[6 : 21] Now, it takes many forms. It may be humanism. It may be existentialism. It may be Marxism. It may be Eastern pantheism. It may be materialism. It may be a new thing called the New Age Movement.

But all these things have one thing in common. That they do not accept that there is a personal being who created the universe and controls it. They do not accept that there is an intelligence outside of the universe that directs and guides the history of the world.

And human beings are just part of this universe, as they understand it, just part of this great impersonal process that is going on. And so, the individual lives of human beings are of no more significance or value than any other item in the universe.

Be it a star, a stake, or even a stone. No more significance, because it's only part of this ongoing process. Now, so far in our society, it's only the weak, the helpless, the unwanted, and the unprotected who have felt the full force of these kind of ideas.

But make no mistake, it will not stop there. Because in any society where these ideas have gained power, it has led inevitably to a depreciation of the value of all human life.

[7 : 55] Witness the victims of Auschwitz or of the Gulag Archipelago. These were caused by societies that held consistently to that kind of worldview.

But that worldview, in different forms and shapes, is still seeking to gain the control of the minds of men, and control of important areas in society, such as the medical profession and other areas.

Now, in opposition to that view is what I've called personalism. What is stated in this verse, I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

It's referring to the fact that we are made in the image of God. God, who has always existed, created the universe. God, the great personal God who has always existed, created the universe and created us as something in some ways part of the universe, but in other ways distinct from the rest of it.

He has created us to be superior to the rest of the material universe. He created Adam to have dominion over the other creatures. He created human beings with intelligence, with creativity, with love and with communication.

[9 : 16] All these things echoing God's own nature, because he created us like himself. And he created us supremely to glorify him and to enjoy him.

Now, that is a view that is totally different from the current wisdom of this world. It stresses that human life has unique significance, dignity and sanctity.

It's protected by the divine command, you shall not murder. And by the divine sanction, whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.

But our text is not only about the significance of human life in general, it is about that, but it is also, and more specifically, about the marvel of the creation of a human life inside the mother.

Here, David is meditating on the fact of his own procreation, his own conception, and he is saying, I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

[10 : 24] In verse 13 he says, You knit me together in my mother's womb. So, the stress of this part of the psalm is very much concerning the importance and the value and significance of human life right from the very beginning.

Now, this has to be stressed today too, not just the general point I've made already about the value of human life according to the Christian ethic, but the value of human life right from conception. It needs to be stressed because some would accept many of the emphasis I've made and that the Bible makes concerning the value of human life. Yes, they would accept that generally speaking, human life has good value and we can't just deal with it in impunity.

But, they would say that there are problems here. They would say that, for instance, well, we don't know if unborn children are really what we would call persons or that they are in the true sense human.

and they would say, well, maybe they become human or become persons at certain stages in their development and various ideas are put forward. Some say it is at the development of what's called the primitive streak, that is, the rudimentary nervous system in the embryo.

[11 : 50] Others would say it is when the fetus becomes viable, that is, that it could be born and it could live outside the womb at that stage. Others would say it is birth itself.

Others would say it is even a few days after birth, when the medical people have decided that this thing that has been born should be accredited as being human.

And so they would do away with all the difficulties of the handicapped children being born. They would say that these can't be certified as being human. So, you see, there are all kinds of problems which the human mind has developed in this area which must be answered.

What does the evidence have to say concerning this question? And I look to two sources of evidence. First of all, what does science say? Pure science.

Not science that is abused and twisted by impersonal philosophy. But what does true science say about the status of the unborn child, this developing human being?

[13 : 00] Well, we discover that, first of all, a fundamental of science is that the life of an individual organism begins at fertilization.

It begins at that point of the union of the seed and the egg. and that is recognized as a fundamental in all biological sciences. And it's recognized even more so today than it was in the past because we have the enormous discoveries of genetics which shows to us that at that moment of fertilization a new individual has been brought into being.

A unique individual with unique genetic characteristics. Now you might wonder what do we mean by genetics and these things? It simply means this. That at that stage there is a code in that one cell that spells out many of the essential characteristics of that individual.

When you or I were conceived at that moment it was determined what color of eyes we would have. It would be determined what general bodily size we would have.

It was determined what facial characteristics we would have. It was also determined many of our personality traits and many other things but these are some of the most important ones at that moment.

[14 : 25] You see all that is spelled out by that genetic code and that is a new individual in scientific terms at that point.

But then let's take it on a little bit further. Twelve weeks into development. At that stage the heart has been beating for nine weeks. Brain activity has been detectable by scientists for six weeks prior to that.

And at that stage it has its fingerprints which are unique to every human individual and it recoils from pain. So the fetus as it's called by that stage is human in all these characteristics and it is at that stage and even later that many abortions are carried out killing that unborn child.

So you see scientifically it is shown by these things that at these early stages the embryo first and then the fetus has got clearly human characteristics.

But of course science is not all the evidence that we must bring forward because the Bible itself has got something tremendously important to say on this question of the status of the child.

[15 : 54] This verse I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Notice David says I am fearfully and wonderfully made. He's referring here back to what he's been talking about in verse 13 you knit me together in my mother's womb.

He doesn't say you knit my body together but he could quite easily have said he doesn't say you knit my fetus or my embryo together if he would have used such words he doesn't say that he says you knit me together I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

In other words he's saying that at that early early stage he can talk of himself as being I as being me in other words of being a person. Now some people talk about this as being just retrospective. Retrospective just means looking back. Well of course it's looking back but I don't see what the use of a complicated Latin word means by explaining away what is obvious here that David is saying that at that point in the womb he was a person.

Now that is true of David. David was a man of like passions as ourselves. If that is true of David it is true the Bible teaches of every individual human being.

[17 : 14] That is where our life begins that is where our personhood begins. But also there are other parts of biblical truth that emphasize this. For instance there's the biblical word that is used of the father's role in procreation.

You know this word that we often wondered at when I suppose we were children what did it mean? So and so begat so and so. We almost wondered what that meant. And then eventually perhaps we figured it out what it actually meant.

It meant he became the father of it. It meant that through the procreative act he was the father like Abraham was the father of Isaac. Now if that word is used consistently through scripture as it is, it is saying that this new person, say in this instance Isaac, came into being through that procreative act. Therefore his life, Isaac's life, began at that point. Abraham did not beget just a body or just an embryo or a fetus, he begat Isaac.

And that again is a strong biblical emphasis, stressing that the human life begins from conception. But then again there's Psalm 51 where we're told by David again that he was conceived in sin.

[18 : 41] Now that doesn't sound very nice, but it means that it has something else to say to us about this great issue. What that does not mean for a start is it's not referring to the procreative act as sinful.

It is David who is in sin. It is not the act itself that is sinful. It is stating my sinfulness from the moment of conception.

In other words it is talking about what we call in theological terms original sin. That means that ever since the fall of Adam the whole human race has been in sin. And as soon as we are created in this world we are in sin.

That is our state, that's our condition. We are guilty before God and we lack original righteousness and we ourselves cannot even approximate to keeping God's law in this life.

So then David is here stressing that from that early age, from that conception, we are in sin. sin. Now, a body can't be in sin.

[19 : 54] An embryo or a fetus can't be in sin if we mean that these things are not persons. Only a person can be in sin. Only a person can be held guilty before God.

Only a person has a nature that is corrupted in every aspect of its nature by sin. So when David says that his mother conceived him in sin, he is saying that he was a person at that moment and he was in a condition of sin before God.

So not only here do we have the stress that again the unborn child is a person, but we have the stress upon the dire need of each child born into the world.

The dire need of each child to know the message of God's word, to know the power of God's Holy Spirit to transform that child.

The need of that child to know the power of God in the new birth to be brought into the image and likeness of God eventually. So we have not only here the tremendous value and significance of human life described, but also the tremendous need.

[21 : 14] But then there's another emphasis of scripture that stresses this value and significance of human life right from conception, and that is the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, when Jesus took a human nature.

Now we're told in the New Testament that he had to be made like us in every way, like his brothers in every way. That's in Hebrews chapter two. That is every way apart from sin.

There was no sin in him, but in every other way he was to be like us. Now we must bear that in mind as we think on this question. Now the necessity of that, of being like us in every way, was so that he could be the second Adam.

That is the second great representative of the human race. Adam represented the human race, and Adam sinned and fell, and all the human race came into a state of sin and misery. But the second Adam comes to represent the human race, to succeed.

But he must be fully human. He must truly represent us, so he was made like us in every way. Now we know as an absolute fact of New Testament truth, that the human life of the Lord Jesus Christ began at conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

[22 : 33] His human life began there right from conception. Now if that is true, that the Lord Jesus life began there, and he had to be made like us in every way, therefore that implies that our human life must also begin at conception.

Now that is worth thinking about, because it is bound up with the great work of God in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, sending him into the world to be our Saviour.

So every time we rejoice at the birth of a child as we do today, we must remember also the birth of that other child, the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ at Bethlehem, when he came into the world, made in all points as we are, apart from sin, to redeem us, coming into the world to take upon himself the curse of Adam's sin, and of all the human sins since then, so that we, by trusting in him, can be set free and can be brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

So that is some of the evidence that the Bible brings forward concerning the status of children right from the very beginning of conception.

But then there are doubts and problems which are thrown up by the position that I've just outlined, supported not only by scripture but also by science. Doubts and questions thrown up by that position.

[24 : 17] First of all, there are doubts concerning, well, maybe we could say there maybe are some other stages of the development when this embryo or fetus becomes human as I mentioned already.

And there would be some people would have questions about, well, whether it is at the point of fertilization or at the point of implantation. We needn't go into the meaning of all that. But the point is this, if there are doubts, genuine, honest doubts on any of these questions, how must these doubts operate?

In which direction must they operate? Surely, when there is doubt, it must operate in the direction of the benefit of the child.

If we are unsure as to whether this embryo or this fetus is a human being, if we are unsure about it, then surely the benefit of doubt must be given to this fetus or embryo to be allowed to live.

if we have doubts in other areas of life, we must exercise the benefit of doubt in the direction of the person concerned.

[25 : 36] For instance, if a firm have got a contract to demolish an old building, it is not good enough for them to say, well, we're not sure if there are people still living in that building.

they have to make absolutely sure that there is no person in that building before they blow it up. The benefit of doubt must be exercised in the direction of the possibility of there being a person there.

And in many other areas of life, that is true, and so it ought to be true in this area. And so it should be true in areas like embryo research or experimentation.

that would be destructive to the life of the embryo. It must be exercised in the area of abortion, and many other areas. Even if there are doubts about it, if people have genuine doubts as to whether what I've been saying this morning is true, if there is doubt then there must be protection of that unborn child.

But then there are problems put forward, and these are very serious and very complex problems. problems. And there are ones that can't be dealt with just quickly in a few minutes here today, to everybody's satisfaction.

[26 : 55] But for instance, one of the great problems is, and that is always put forward, is the question of well, what about if the mother's life is in danger by a pregnancy continuing?

Now, this is something that was much more of a problem in the past than it is today. with the development of medical science today, mothers can be looked after much better, and that if at a later stage it is recognized there is a danger to the mother's life, the pregnancy can be brought to an end, and the child born and born alive, and looked after, even although it may be very premature.

But we might say that well, if there is a danger at that stage, we have to act in that way, to save the life of the mother, but still to do everything we can to save the life of the baby as well.

But there are other difficult areas. What about the area of handicapped, or the area of rape? These again are problems, where it is diagnosed before a baby is born, that this baby is going to be handicapped.

How do you deal with that? Well, we've got to look at it very carefully, and very sympathetically, and compassionately, but we must ask serious questions that go to the root of the whole thing.

[28 : 16] Are you going to say that because a person is physically or mentally handicapped, and remember this is what we're talking about, if we've accepted what I've said about the unborn child, a person who is handicapped, if we're going to accept that they're a person, then are we going to say that we can take the life of that person, because it is not convenient for society at large, or for parents in particular.

If we adopt that thinking, we're right down the road that I was talking about earlier, of human life being accounted as disposable. You see, it's not sometimes these issues in themselves considered that seem so tremendous, it's actually when we see where it leads to, and what it is part of.

So that if it starts with terminating the life of a handicapped fetus in the womb, it can lead on to saying, well, what about handicapped people who are taking up hospital places and costing so much to society at large?

That's how it began in Nazi Germany. It was not only Jewish people who suffered a Holocaust in Nazi Germany, many other unwanted people suffered the same fate.

So we again have got to consider that question extremely carefully and give to the handicapped and the weak and the unprotected and the unwanted the protection which God's word demands.

[29 : 50] Yes, it may be difficult. Yes, it may demand tremendous amount of work, but that's what God's word calls us to. And again, similarly in the question of rape, a tremendously difficult question.

And in no way can we ever give any justification to the crime of rape, a horrible crime. But can we say that two wrongs will make a right? That taking away the life of the child born as a result of that will undo the first wrong?

It will actually add to it and complicate it. For to the feelings of guilt, which ought not to be there, but they will be there, the feelings of guilt in the woman concerning the rape, there will also be added the true guilt of having taken part in giving the decision perhaps to take away the life of this child.

So it only adds to the problem rather than solves it. And of course, there are ways in which this could be worked out, like adoption and so on.

So there are answers to some of these very deep and profound problems. And we mustn't think that we can just simply write off such problems one way or another.

[31 : 05] And also, of course, in the very simple and perhaps the most prevalent case of simply an unmarried mother. So many times today, pressure is brought upon a teenage girl, an unmarried mother, to abort her child.

So often the pressure not coming from herself, but coming from her parents and from her doctors. And often, sad to say, such pressure coming from church or even Christian parents.

Now surely that is an absolute abomination, that we should care more about what society thinks of us than we should care about the life of an unborn child.

child. Yes, there are problems. Problems that need to be dealt with in compassion. And problems that need our support.

Because any of these people we've mentioned, with any of these tremendous problems facing them, need not just understanding, but they need practical support. So that if you or I know of someone who's an unmarried mother, we want to support and to encourage them.

[32 : 18] Say they've gone ahead and had their child. We want to praise them for doing that. We don't praise the original act of sex outside marriage. But we praise them for the courage to have gone ahead and had their child and not to abort.

And we want to support them. surely that must be the Christian view. So then, what does this text have to say to us in general?

It has to tell us something about attitude to our children. All these questions we've been considering in detail, but also the great question of our attitude to our children in general.

They are fearfully and wonderfully made. And when you have a child under your care, whether it is as a parent or as a guardian or as someone else, you have something precious in your care and guardianship.

Someone made in the image of God. Someone fearfully and wonderfully made. Someone who has unique value and significance. Someone to whom you are answerable to God for how you treat that person.

[33 : 30] But then also this is something to say about our attitude to God. For David's words are, I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

You see, we've been thinking perhaps mostly about what this has to say about the value of human beings. And that has to be stressed today. But that can only be said because of God.

Because God has done it and because God has revealed it. He has made us in His image and He has told us that we're made in His image. And David's response is the only right one.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. And if our response today falls short of that, it is not the response that should come in the light of God's word and His grace to us.

If our response is just this marvel about the marvels of what science has discovered about the unborn child or the marvels of what the Christian faith teaches about the value of human life.

[34 : 32] And just to leave it at that is not enough. You today are called to praise God because of who He is and what He has done and what He has said concerning us and especially that He has sent His Son into the world to become one of us, yes, even at that lowest of all level, being conceived in the womb, to deliver us from our sins.

Let us pray. Our gracious and loving Heavenly Father, we are amazed as we consider the wonders of your creation, as we hear about them and discover them through various means, through perhaps learning about these things in school or in college or university, perhaps seeing things on television.

And also we are amazed as we discover the things that you teach in your word concerning all these things. Oh gracious Lord, we pray that you would help us to truly bow in wonder and adoration, that we would acknowledge you as Lord and King, that we would acknowledge your wisdom, your intelligence and your power, that we would acknowledge your authority to speak to us and to command us.

And that we would accept what you have done for us in Jesus Christ. And we pray for our poor, tortured and broken society in so many ways having fled from you and discovering the bitterness of a harvest that they have sown.

Gracious Lord, we pray for people in some of the difficult situations where difficult decisions have to be made. we ask that you would grant to them your own light of your word and encouragement to do what is good and to stand for what is right.

[36 : 32] And we pray that you would cause your people in those situations to be salt and light, bringing the love of Jesus Christ and the truth of his word into some of these complicated situations.

Now we ask, gracious Lord, that you would bless us in the rest of our time together here. And especially we pray that you would bless the sacrament of baptism to all here today, those who witness and those who take part for the glory of Jesus Christ.

Amen.