

Human Life and Its Value

by J. Glyn Owen

Human life has great value because man is made in God's image and bears the image of his Creator.

Duration: 43:48

Scripture: Psalm 8:4

Topics: "Human Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the unique value and dignity of human life. He references the passage from the Epistle to the Hebrews that speaks of man being made lower than the angels but crowned with glory and honor. The speaker argues that society's failure to recognize the distinction between human beings and other creatures has led to the devaluation of human life. He calls for the proclamation of the word of God and the declaration of the meaning and purpose of life to combat this devaluation. Additionally, the speaker highlights the potential destiny of man as rulers of the universe and emphasizes the responsibility to not harm fellow human beings.

Transcript

My message this morning is not based upon any one particular text of scripture, but upon a number of passages to which we shall have occasion to refer as we proceed. Moreover, the subject this morning is largely determined by the circumstances of the hour. All around us we encounter those who by act or attitude, by word of mouth or the work of their hands, are involved in what we may speak of generally as the devaluation of human life, or in such acts as are indicative of this.

I therefore want to address myself to what we have outlined, what we have announced in the bulletin as human life and its worth, human life and its value. Fallen man is a veritable bundle of contradictions. We all are.

The saint should become less and less a contradiction, but apart from the grace of God we are all a bundle of contradictions. But this is essentially so of the non-Christian man and of the non-Christian world, and this is nowhere more apparent than in our attitude to human life. Now let me illustrate this point with one or two quotations.

On the one hand, as a leading article in a certain British periodical said recently, I quote, we send a rare drug or vaccine called for by radio halfway across the world to save the life of a single child. We fly Siamese twins from Nigeria to Britain and operate on them surgically in the hope of saving their lives, and

their progress is daily news in the national press. Where there is flood or earthquake or other disaster, we drop tons of foodstuffs from the air in the hope of keeping people alive.

In India, for example, where already an excessive population over-resources causes acute widespread poverty and starvation, the threat of an epidemic of cholera that ages old preservative against overpopulation is met by a campaign for inoculation, continent-wide. So determined are we that, cost what it may, people shall not die that way. Now, on the other hand--that's one side of the story--on the other hand, we all, in our various ways, treat human life from time to time with utter contempt and thoughtlessness.

By murderous words--and I don't need to enlarge upon that--words kill. By soul-destroying attitudes and selfish deeds, we pollute the moral atmosphere, we persecute one another, and we promote the kind of de-oxygenized moral climate in the world which suffocates and slays men with a far more terrifying consequence than Hitler's dastardly deeds during the last war. Who is responsible for the moral climate of our DNA? We are.

And we have brought the world into such an impasse that men can contemplate the kind of things they do without hardly a tinge of conscience. And therefore, God, we, the Church, are especially responsible. Now, one of the by-products--and I would like you to notice where I put it, as far as I can understand the issue--one of the by-products of this polluted atmosphere is the contemporary notion that we have the right to interfere with human life willy-nilly, without even pausing to explain ourselves or to seek a reason for that.

We assume that we have a right to do this and a right to do that, and to tamper with God's creature just as we please. Now, at this point, I want to interject something. From a pastoral point of view, I'm very concerned, lest there should be some among us this morning, who will have been involved in incidents that have involved the fetus in the mother's womb, or involved individuals at the other end of the scale toward the end of life, and who have done so perhaps on the spur of an impulse, or at a time when emotions were so aroused that it was impossible to think clearly.

Now, I'm not speaking to such. I want to assure such that the grace and the pardoning mercy of God avail. I'm not speaking to individual cases of this, that, or the other illustration of this principle.

I am concerned this morning with a whole scale tide of the hour, which is to this end. It assumes, or presumes, that men have the right willy-nilly to tamper with the life that God has given. Having interjected that note from a pastoral point of view, now let us try to address ourselves objectively--as objectively and as biblically as we can--to this very serious issue, which is emerging especially in our day and age.

Now, as I see it, man has become terribly inflated with a sense of his own genius and accomplishments over these recent years in the realm of science and technology. And this is really the atmosphere which has been responsible for so much that is done today. Inflated with considerable pride arising from these things, modern man has come to presume that he has the right to do anything that he pleases.

He is not answerable to man, nor to God. God has long ago been voted out of consideration. Now, I think that there are those who approach life in this blase sort of way on two or three different levels, and we need to see that they are all of a piece.

First of all, there is the assumption of the right to arrest the emerging life in the mother's womb in its early stages, and then prematurely and artificially to abort the fetus. This is the assumption that is underlying the claim for abortion on demand. Life is harassed in its beginning.

Secondly, there is the assumption of the right to terminate human life somewhere later on along the line. Sometimes when those who are near and dear to us are afflicted with an incurable disease, sometimes when, as the folk concerned tell us, a human being has become nothing but a vegetable, they assume the right to interfere and to terminate life as and when the scientist or who have you determines it is right and proper. And thirdly, there is the assumption of the right so to tamper with a human mind and a human brain, or sometimes the human body, as completely to transform the personality that God has made and God has given.

At the beginnings of life, at the end of life, and in between then, there are those who assume that they have the right as human beings, as scientists especially, to do this kind of thing. Now, though in principle perhaps somewhat remote from these and distinguishable from them, I feel we must also mention other things. I am hesitant in referring to the first, but refer to it I must, because coming down this morning there was an incident in which I was almost involved in it, and I refer to careless driving.

You know, it's very easy for us to talk about abortion and to talk about euthanasia and to condemn them outright, and some of us are driving on the roads as if we had the right to do just as we please, and we play with other lives. After the incident to which I refer this morning, which was not all that serious, but I think I should have had more thought for other people. After that incident, I'm hesitant to refer to this, but I think I ought, in order to show what a contradiction we are.

I was going home from Knox just a matter of a fortnight ago, and I was traveling up Bay View, and there was an incident which could have been most serious in its consequences. About twelve cars were involved. One car came and meandered from one lane to another, cutting in and cutting out.

I couldn't understand what was happening behind me and on my side, until the offending car came right in front of mine. And then I saw what had happened. And in his back window I saw these words, stop abortion.

I thought to myself, yes, but I would like to stop some other things too. You see, it's the same principle. The application is different.

But it's playing with human life. And it can happen as easily when a cyclist crosses the road on your pedestrian crossings without thinking--or a pedestrian, for that matter--as it can happen in these other realms to which I have referred. Terroristness, thoughtlessness of human life.

I also think of the cruelty that leads to the murder in our towns and cities. And, of course, the cold, calculated destruction of life in war. All these things are all of a piece.

You may be able to distinguish them somewhat, but ultimately they belong to the same general spectrum. Now, our only court of appeal as we approach such issues is, of course, the Word of God. What is to be our attitude to these things? What ought to be our attitude? Or, let me put it like this, what ought to determine our attitude? We believe that the Word of God is profitable for doctrine, for correction, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished and prepared unto every good work.

All right, we must turn to it. What is it to say? I believe that the Scriptures give us some guiding principles. Many people are annoyed at the Bible because it doesn't mention some of these things by name.

Well, of course, it doesn't. If it did, then it would only apply, perhaps, to our age and not to another. The Bible doesn't do that.

The Bible is a book for every age, and the way in which it is a book for every age is this. It enunciates general principles. And when God has imparted to us his Holy Spirit, he expects us to dig up these principles, to take them seriously, and to apply each man, each woman, each fellow and girl to his or her own peculiar circumstances.

And let me say, this is really the process of sanctification. It's part and parcel of the business of growing up. It is getting hold not simply of texts of the Bible.

Now, I'm about to go off on a hobby horse. I have one or two. This is one.

It is not enough for us to know the text of Scripture. We need to know the doctrines of Scripture, the principles underlying Scripture. You see, men can hurl texts at us without recognizing the principles embodied in the text, and therefore not applying them to life.

We need to know the principles operating in Scripture, inherent in Scripture, underlying Scripture, and we shall find that the Bible is one in this sense. And then, on our knees, with the Word of God before us and the Spirit of God within us, we need to thrash these things out and apply the principles, every man before God. For we shall give account of ourselves, not of other people.

Now, what are these biblical principles that relate to the issue before us today, human life and its worth or its value? Of course, I can only refer to some. The first to which I want to refer is the fact of man's relation to deity, man's relation to God. The Bible would always have us see man and human life in terms of their relationship to their Creator, to God.

Failure to do this can result in confusion of thought and then in improper and unworthy attitudes and actions. Now, let me put it to you like this, very simply, and in a way which is only reminding you of what you know already. This is nothing new, this is something we all know but need to be reminded of.

Man, according to the Bible, was made after God's image. You heard that in our Scripture reading today. A human being is not simply a divinely structured entity.

Or, says the psalmist, I am fearfully and wonderfully made. The architect, the thought of my body and thought of my brain and thought of me as an entity, a body and a spirit, a mind and so forth, is a wonderful architect. He structured me.

But a human being is not simply a divinely structured entity created and sustained by his Creator. He is a divine creation which was patterned after God's own image. Listen again to Genesis.

Then God said, Let us make man in our image after our likeness. So God created man in his own image. In the image of God created he him, male and female created he them.

Genesis 1, 26 and 27. Now, it's not my intention to pursue the question as to what that means and implies. We can't do that today.

What is this image of God which is reflected in man? Well, now, I'm not concerned with that in detail but with the principle. Because, you see, this applies only to man among the whole creation of God. All creation sprang into existence by the act of God, by God.

Man was not only made by God but he was made like God. Now, whatever it means, the only thing I want to establish this morning is this, that man is altogether a singular, a unique entity in God's world. To tamper with man, to play fast and loose with human life at any stage, is to play fast and loose with a creature who is altogether unique.

Herein lies man's essential greatness and his essential dignity. In some sense, he bears the image of his Creator. Now, since man is thus so uniquely related to God, he is a creature of superlative worth.

Even when his life is in ruins, those very ruins bespeak of a majesty. Some of us have become so influenced by the carnal thinking of our age that we fail to see this. And when we see a man fallen, or when we see a man begrimed in sin and dirt, we tend to turn our backs.

It's all because we're out of alignment with the Bible. A fallen man is a man God made. We may see the ruins, but the ruins themselves are stately, for no other creature bears the image of God as man bears it.

It may be marred, it may be spoiled, but it can never be obliterated until eternity dawns and the lost are cast into the lake of fire. Nothing short of the fires of eternity can obliterate that image totally. Indeed, salvation in the New Testament is speaking as the renewal of the image.

Not the re-emergence of something new, but taking something that is basically there, perfecting it, re-embossing it in the divine press, and bringing it to maturity and to glory. Now, to deal with man and human life in a manner that is unworthy, then, is a gross sin. When Adam and Eve marred God's image in themselves, mark you, not in other people now, in themselves, they were put outside the ancient paradise, and a flaming cherubim with sword in hand stood betwixt them on the return to the garden of Eden.

When Cain assumed the right to dispense with his brother's life, he received a correspondingly stern sentence, Genesis 4, 10 to 12. God warns Noah and his sons that whereas it is the Creator's prerogative to destroy the creature at any time, God has just done that in the flood. And in chapter 9 of Genesis, God is addressing Noah and his sons in the new day, the new age.

Now God has done that, he is the Creator, and he has the right to dispose of all his creatures and is answerable to no man, no government, but to himself alone. He is just, he is wise, and as the Creator and sovereign Lord, he has the right so to do. Man, who are you to quibble with your Creator? Who am I? But having so said, and having so done, God warns Noah and his sons that whereas it is his prerogative to destroy the creature, he does not impart that prerogative to man.

Let me read, Genesis 9, 5 to 7. For your lifeblood, I will surely require a reckoning. Of every beast I will require it, and of man. Of every man's brother I will require the life of man.

Whoso sheds the blood of man, thy man shall his blood be shed. Why? For God made man in his own image. Genesis 9, 5 to 7. You see the principle.

Because of man's being so utterly unique, bearing the image of his Creator, God says, I alone have the right to dispense with man. Hands off, Noah. You can't do as I do.

I am Lord, and I will require a reckoning if you attempt it. That principle, of course, and I must say this because I'm sure some of you will be thinking of it, that principle is qualified later on, when God gives the power of life to magistrates and to others in authority. But now this is a different thing.

When God gives authority to take away life to any individual, or to a government, or to a prince or a magistrate, this is a different thing altogether. God can give it, but it must be of God. We are not discussing this morning a divinely appointed ordinance, we are discussing this morning the claim by men, willy-nilly, to tamper with human life.

So much is evident, therefore, from the simple fact that man is created according to God's image. Let me go on. Secondly, along with man's relation to deity, we need also to note a second fact of revelation, namely, man's comparative dignity.

Man in comparison with other creatures. Now, in a sense, this is involved in what we've already been saying, but I want to bring it out, and I want to focus attention upon it. It is not always appreciated.

What is the Bible presentation of man, other than as a creature bearing God's image? Well now, let me mention two or three things. One, man was created to have dominion over the whole created earth. Let me read again.

And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the earth, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. Did you get that principle? Let them have dominion, let them have sovereignty, such as the comparative glory of man in relation to the rest of creation. Himself, subject to his God, everything is to be in subjection to man.

Now, this is the picture. God meant man to be a sovereign, a king, his own vice regent to the universe, or in the universe. Every creature on land, in the sea, or in the air, is to serve the purpose of man, as man serves the will of God.

Secondly, in this connection, created to rule over the rest of creation, man was assured by God that the vast creation over which he is to rule may be used by him for his own well-being. Now, I want to stress this, though again this was inherent in the last point we made, but I want to stress it. And I want to quote again Genesis 1.29 and Genesis 9.3. God said, behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, given it to you.

And every tree which with seed in its fruit, you shall have them for food. Can you see the point? Everything is to minister for man. I've given it all to you, says the Almighty.

And then in Genesis 9.3. Every moving thing that lives shall get food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. I give you everything.

In other words, God says, man, I've made you to be ruler over the creation, to be my vice-regent. Now, in this task of ruling the universe for me, everything's yours. I've got the whole universe at your disposal.

It is yours as you were subject to me. It must serve you as you serve me. Thirdly, in this connection, over against man's sovereignty over the rest of creation, and his divinely assured liberty to slay beast and devour vegetable for his own well-being, he himself was deliberately warned that he must in no wise slay his fellow man.

It is most significant, in Genesis 9, that in a context which has to do with his necessary acquisition of food and drink, God tells man, you can partake of vegetable life, it's all yours. All the creatures that have been made, they're yours. But human life you must not touch, even if you're starving.

Let me read again. For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning. Of every beast will I require his hand of man.

Of every man's brother will I require the life of a man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed. For God made man in his own image.

It all stems from that. Human life, then, is different. You see, this whole concept of the evolution as it is taught generally in our schools and in our college has so involved us in wrong thinking.

We see no difference between the tadpole and the saint. And this is why we're in this awful mess we are in today. Because virtually we have been indoctrinated to see no distinction between a bead of slime and the man God made.

You can't blame people that know not God nor his word ultimately for behaving as if this were so. They must be taught. The word of God must be proclaimed.

The meaning and practice of life must be declared far and wide. And we must do this. And who is there to do it if you and I don't? Human life is different.

Man's relation to the deity, man's comparative dignity, he is above every other creature. Though all the creatures emanate from the divine hand. And my third point is this.

It relates to man's potential dignity. Why can't we tamper with human life? It is because of man's potential destiny, I should say, not dignity. In relation to the universe at large, we have already said that man is destined to be its ruler.

I say no more about that. In relation to angelic beings, man is destined to be their superior. Our world is so materialistic that we can't talk about angels.

You know, it's very sad. Time was when the saints knew a lot about the ministry of angels. We've become so unbiblical in our thinking and in our attitude that we can't talk seriously about angels now.

Many of the saints know nothing about the ministry of angels. It's looked upon as something mythical, altogether from another world, a pansyful notion, the creation of man. It is not.

And many of us need angels with us. And we need to know that they are God's servants still. But we don't, and we falter, and we have to find some other entity to try and bolster up our spirits in times of need.

God has his angels. Just one word about this, and one passage only. You see, my subject this morning is too large to deal with effectively, but let me just say one word about this.

In relation to the angelic beings, man is destined to be their superior. Why do I say that? Let me read the scriptures. Hebrews 2, 5 to 10.

For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere. What is man that thou art mindful of him? Or the Son of Man that thou carest for

him? Thou didst make him for a little while lower than the angels.

But notice the passage doesn't stop there. Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet. Now, in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control.

As it is, says the writer of Ephesians to the Hebrews, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him, but this is what we do see. We see Jesus crowned. Now can I put that in summary form, in capsule form? That is a word introduced over our missionary conference, I rather like it.

Can I put that in capsule form? Man is destined to be Lord above and over the angels and the archangels and the seraphim. Lord over them. But we don't see him there yet.

No, but one thing we do see. We see Jesus, the man with a capital M, our Savior, our Lord, who represented us in death, on the cross, in the grave, now representing us on the throne. There's a man in him.

There's a man above the angels. The last Adam is on the throne. He's King of kings and Lord of lords, and he's there not simply as a personal, individual being, but as our representative and high priest.

What does that mean, this? As surely as he is there, those for whom he died and rose again and ascended and is in him, those who have belonged to him by faith and grace will arrive. This is man's destiny. In relation to the universe at large, man is destined to be its ruler.

In relation to angelic beings, man is destined to be their superior. And lastly in this connection, in relation to God himself. Man, by God's grace, may not simply be his ransomed and regenerate child, great and immense as this privilege is, not only his active and cooperating servant, wonderful as that is.

Do you know what the Bible says? I feel like holding my breath when I talk about this. It says that man is the heir of God, and joint heir with Jesus Christ, to whom every knee shall bow, and whom every tongue will confess that he is wrong. Oh, saints of God who read your Bibles, don't gloss over this great truth.

You and I are joint heirs with Jesus Christ, heirs of God. Now again, tantalizing it maybe, I'm not going to attempt to elucidate all that that means. The only thing I want to get across this morning is the wonder of it, whatever it is.

Heir of God, you can't say that about a dog, you can't say that about a horse, you can't say that about any other creature. I love dogs and I love horses. You can't say that about any other part of God's creation, but you can say that about man in Christ Jesus.

Now let me recapitulate as I close. Man is uniquely related to the deity, bearing the image of God. Uniquely related to the deity as bearer of his image, man is also endowed with the dignity of being God's vice-regent over the whole world, and the whole world is to serve him.

Over and above his dignity, as made in God's image, and as his vice-regent over the whole creation, man's potential destiny is described in terms of joint heirship with Jesus Christ. Now briefly, how do we apply this? I suggest to you that we need to be very solemn and somber in applying this to life. Your attitude to the person that sits next to you today, your attitude to another human being, be it in the house of God, be it on the street, be it on the operating table, be it as a doctor attending to a patient, be it in any

connection whatsoever, should be determined by these facts.

To experiment on a captive unseen, to tamper with a creature of God is unlovable. And our world has lost the distinction between the two. Christians, we dare not.

Therefore, to the genetic engineers who are talking about cloning a man and turning up over the next seven years, I believe, turning up a monstrous replica for every human being at will--whether that claim goes too far, I don't know, but I've seen it in paper. In a scientific journal. Let the genetic engineer who is a Christian come back to his scripture and remind those who are not Christian that they're still subject to the God of the universe.

Let those who are crying for abortion on demand, which is largely generated by our permissive society, let us tell them of the dignity of man and of human life. And to those who come as the champions of euthanasia and who want to destroy human life at its other end, let us, in the name of God, ask them to face the issues and the principles that we have been trying, albeit very briefly, to elucidate this morning. Now, as far as we Christians are concerned, this is part and parcel of the discipline of growing up in Christian experience.

I mentioned this at the beginning, and I want to mention it at its close, together with one other thing. I believe that the application of these principles is involved in every individual life, and we must take it seriously, individually. There are Christian people who are always expecting some specialist in the world of ethics or in some other world to tell us what to do.

My friend, that's not God's way. As I understand it, that's not God's way. I thank God for men who are able to go into the disciplines of an ethical understanding of life based on scripture.

I thank God for their works. But ultimately, this is the discipline of a Christian growing up. Read the Word.

Get the principles. Apply them to your own life. Don't look at other people.

Apply them to your own life as a man or a woman who is responsible to God. Now, the other thing is this. We shall find from time to time that some of our dearest and nearest may disagree with us.

We must respect them. If they accept the obvious principles of scripture, and in the outworking of these principles they disagree from us, well then, we must, as brethren in Christ, agree to disagree. This does not mean to say that we do not stand for what we believe to be right, but it does mean this, that ultimately it is only God who knows all the fact about every individual.

And you and I must not appear as if we were already the arbiters and the judge of all nations and of all men. On the contrary, assure that the basic principles of scripture are accepted by our fellow Christians and fellow men, where they are accepted, of course. Then every man stands before God.

We shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, not to answer for those that live near to us or worship in the same church as us, but we shall receive according to that which each man has done. You and I will stand before God on that day to answer for ourselves. I am very conscious as I come to a close this morning that I have skimmed so much over the surface of this tremendous issue, and there are many questions that I have not attempted to tackle, but I want, in closing, to say that I distinguish between two things.

Exceptions there may sometimes emerge--I believe that. Exceptions there may sometimes emerge when a man is presented with but the lesser of two. We are not dealing with such issues.

I am addressing myself this morning to the almost wholesale demand to do as we please with the young and with the old and those in between, and make no bones about it. There is a very vocal community in certain circles today who, in years to come, would want to bring into existence the kind of people that they think ought to inhabit our countries. And the engineers are busy, busy, busy at it.

God save us. These are the truths whereby we should allow our own lives to be guided and directed, and truths which we should gladly and with all our powers apply to the whole of life. Let us pray.

O Lord our God, who art the author and the judge of life, grant us to know thy truth, and to know the power of thy truth over our lives, constraining and restraining us at all times in thy perfect way. Forgive us, O Lord, where we have acted precipitately, improperly, impulsively, and thereby harmed another human being in one way or another. O Lord, make us our brother's keepers and protectors, and save us and our country from the lunatic consequences of living as if we had the right to determine everything, even the issues of life and of death.

Solemnize us to our legitimate duties and responsibilities. Save us from presuming to be gods in our age. Hear us, forgive us, cleanse us, direct us to the everlasting praise and glory of thy name, in Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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