

# Rescuing the Unborn: *A Duty We Cannot Dodge*

Proverbs 24:10-12

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC Mandarin & Pearland Services on 1/22/2017

## Introduction

- ❖ This morning we're going to address a critical and emotionally-sensitive issue. You may not be aware, but today marks the 44th anniversary of the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision. Since 1973, approximately 58 million legal abortions have been performed in our nation<sup>1</sup>. Nearly 3,000 abortions occur each day. Three thousand human lives are terminated on a daily basis with legal and cultural sanction. 58 million lives over a span of forty-four years.
  - ▶ To put that into perspective, the estimated death toll for WWII, including civilian casualties, ranges from 50 to 70 million lives. It's the deadliest war in world history. We all recognize that. And yet another war, equal in scope, has been waging under our noses with the consent of law and populace for the last forty-four years.
  
- ❖ I take no pleasure in sharing these things. Personally, it would be far more comfortable to avoid this topic. But on this day, across this country, evangelical churches are observing Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. It's an annual observance that we've kept as a church. I remember our former senior pastor routinely preaching on abortion every January.
  - ▶ So I feel a sense of compulsion. I'm compelled by the Word of God to preach this message. If I faint from this task in the day of adversity – my strength surely would be small. So I have to preach this. And I hope to do so preaching both grace and truth.
  
- ❖ Now I realize that for many people here abortion gets very personal. I recognize there are women among us who have had an abortion as well as parents or men who have encouraged one. I understand that for many of you, these events took place before you came to faith, before you developed Christian convictions, while you were growing up in a culture that accepted and sometimes even encouraged abortion.
  - ▶ But even so, I realize what I'm going to say will bring up many emotions that have been buried away deep in the past. There are some here who have been carrying around a heavy burden of guilt and shame because of abortion.
    - **This morning you need to hear about the grace of God through the person and ministry of Jesus the Son of God – who can forgive your sins, who can forgive your part in that abortion.** You need to hear about his great love for you, about his power to heal a heart and conscience that has been torn by past decisions. I want to preach grace to you.
  
- ❖ **But another aim in preaching this message is to stir up Christians like myself. Those who have little personal experience with abortion.** Those who are tempted to ignore shameful, private issues like this. Shouldn't we just focus on preaching the gospel?
  - ▶ But the gospel has implications. It demands (as well as enables) love for neighbor – even the unseen, microscopic neighbor hidden in a mother's womb.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nrlc.org/uploads/factsheets/FS01AbortionintheUS.pdf>

- ❖ If the truth of the gospel demands we love *the least of these* (Mt. 25:40), then the truth of the gospel demands we care about abortion. It demands we speak for the voiceless and advocate for the helpless. Church, if we seek to be faithful to God and his gospel, then this is a duty we cannot dodge.
- ❖ That leads us to today's passage in **Proverbs 24**. Our text is found in a section of Proverbs called the *Thirty Sayings of the Wise*. It starts in chapter 22:17 where the writer says he's going to offer "*thirty sayings of counsel and knowledge*". Which, if you heed them, you'll not only know how to discern what is right and true, but your faith will grow in the Lord (22:17-21). Our passage is the 25th wise saying.

### A Test of Convictional Strength

- ❖ Read v10 with me again. "<sup>10</sup>*If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.*" In other words, the real test of a person's strength is how they respond in the face of adversity.
- ❖ I love reading books about WWII. There are plenty of stories about how the biggest, baddest guy in basic training would be found curled up, frozen in shock on the beaches of Normandy while German bullets whizzed about and dead friends piled around.
  - ▶ **No one really knows the true nature of his or her strength if it is only flexed in times of peace**, when the wind is at your back, when family, friends, and colleagues are cheering you on. **The true test is when the world is against you, when friends and foes alike oppose you or the views you espouse.** That's when you find out if your strength – the strength of your convictions – is large or small.
- ❖ We should be thankful that many of the social causes that Christians are concerned about enjoy popular support from the culture at large. If your Christian convictions lead you to provide relief for widows and orphans or to show mercy to the sick and poor, then by all means, enjoy the popular support that the world will throw your way.
  - ▶ **But if your Christian convictions convict you to care for those whose livelihood is in jeopardy, then how much more should those same convictions convict you to care for those whose very lives are in jeopardy?** If you faint from your duty to seek justice for the unborn because you fear backlash and being socially ostracized, then the strength of your convictions is truly small!

### A Duty We Cannot Dodge

- ❖ Look with me at v11. "<sup>11</sup>*Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.*" Now we have to acknowledge that this a command that is general in nature. We're not provided a specific situation or context. Are we talking about rescuing victims from their attackers? Innocent people wrongly sentenced to die? Prisoners of war set to be slaughtered? Or children being sacrificed to pagan gods?
  - ▶ In the context of the Old Testament, any of these could have applied. **So admittedly this verse doesn't directly address the issue of abortion and rescuing unborn children from slaughter.**

- ❖ But that's to be expected when reading the Proverbs. Remember, these are sayings that intentionally offer general principles. Otherwise you might be tempted to focus only on one particular scenario – one particular class of victims – to the neglect of others.
  - ▶ So in giving us these generalized proverbs, God is expecting us to use spiritual wisdom to apply the principles to the particular life circumstances that confront us.
- ❖ *So what's the generalized principle taught in v11?* The duty demanded of all God-fearers can be put like this: **If a particular group of human beings are being wrongly taken away to death, then those who fear God ought to do whatever they can to rescue them.**
  - ▶ Or to put it another way: If a particular group of human beings are stumbling (slipping off a secure base) and falling into slaughter, then those who fear God ought to do whatever they can to reach out and hold them back from the slaughter. **This is a generalized command impressing upon us the duty to rescue the innocent – to intervene when we become aware that they're being wrongfully killed.**
- ❖ But then in v12, a potential objection is raised by those who *have* neglected their duty. “What if I didn't know? Can I plead ignorance?” Look at v12. *“<sup>12</sup>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?”*
  - ▶ **The writer is acknowledging the possibility that the “slaughter” in view might be hidden, undercover, perpetrated out of sight.** So some may try to excuse themselves from responsibility by pleading ignorance.
- ❖ But notice the response. This kind of excuse doesn't hold up before an all-knowing God. Pleading ignorance might work in a human court since no judge can perceive what's going on in your heart. But it doesn't work in the courtroom of God.
  - ▶ **The One who formed your heart in your mother's womb knows your heart.** He weighs it. He perceives what's going on inside. So even if we plead ignorance, God knows why and how you've allowed yourself to remain in that state. **He knows when your ignorance is actually a guilty ignorance stemming from a hardened heart.**
- ❖ Abortion is a clear example of a slaughter being perpetrated out of sight, and many of you are not in the medical profession so you don't know exactly what happens behind closed doors. And there are plenty of legal and cultural rationalizations to support the practice.
  - ▶ So I realize you feel a sense of ambiguity. It's bigger than you and not within your control. But this passage calls your bluff. **Not only does God know what we really know inside our hearts, he also knows what we willfully neglect to know or try to rationalize away.**
- ❖ This passage is a trumpet call to godly action. If you fear God, if you know he's watching over your soul and will hold you accountable for your actions or lack thereof, then it is your duty to do whatever you can to rescue the unborn.

## The Question of Personhood

- ❖ Now I know what some of you are thinking. **Proverbs 24:11 is calling for the rescue of human beings who are being wrongly led to slaughter, but are the unborn even “human beings”?** Isn’t that the big question always being debated? When does human life begin? At conception? At birth? Or somewhere in between?
- ❖ In the *Roe v. Wade* decision, the Court decided it was in no position to answer that question. Listen to this from the majority opinion, “*We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins. When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to the answer.*”<sup>2</sup>
  - ▶ But ironically, in trying to evade the question, the Court essentially answered it by deciding that the third trimester is the point when the fetus becomes “viable”. **In the eyes of the law, life begins when a fetus can survive independently of its mother.**
- ❖ But a viable, human life in the third trimester can still be legally terminated in cases of rape, incest, and when the mother's health is in danger (but that's been expanded to include her mental health). **And this is all possible because, in *Roe v. Wade*, the Court denied the unborn the legal status of personhood.** Meaning they do not fall under the protection of the 14th Amendment, which guarantees the right to life and equal protection under the law.
- ❖ What this means is that any Christian who wants to think carefully about the issue of abortion needs to grapple with the question of life’s beginning and the personhood of the unborn. *How do we think about these questions from a biblical worldview?* Let me offer a couple thoughts.
- ❖ **First, in regard to the notion that viability outside the womb is somehow a legitimate basis for determining when life begins doesn’t hold up if you subject it to the lessons of experience and reason.**
  - ▶ *Does the location of the unborn in its mother’s womb make it any less of a human being?* Human experience and behavior suggests otherwise. It’s common for parents to give their children nicknames while in utero. We sing and read stories to babies in the womb. We stick ultrasound pictures on the fridge and tell our other children that this is your little brother/sister in mommy’s belly.
    - Our instinct is to treat the unborn as a living human being, regardless of being in or out of the womb. **Only when the baby is unwanted do we begin to dehumanize him/her.**
- ❖ *Is the ability to survive independently of one’s mother an adequate measure of when life begins?* As medical knowledge and technology advances, premature babies are surviving at earlier stages, even into the second trimester. It just shows that this idea of viability only at the third trimester is an arbitrary distinction.

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://supreme.nolo.com/us/410/113/case.html>

- ❖ That's my first thought – that experience and reason are pointing to the unborn as being a living human person. **My second thought is that scriptural evidence suggests that a living human person is present at the moment of conception.**
  - ▶ From the moment of fertilization, the human embryo is a unique living person in the eyes of God. *Why do I believe this to be so?* Instead of just giving you a list of verses (Ps. 139:13; Gen. 25:22; Lk. 1:41, cf. 2:12), the best answer to all our questions is always the same answer – Jesus!
  
- ❖ In Luke's Gospel, Mary is told by an angel that "*you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.*" (Lk. 1:31) Mary asked how this could be since she was a virgin. She was told: "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.*" (Lk. 1:35) In Matthew's Gospel, Joseph is told to take Mary as his wife, "*for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.*" (Mt. 1:20)
  - ▶ If you believe Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, then you inevitably believe life begins at conception. **Because when the Spirit came upon the Virgin, God the Spirit miraculously conceived a embryo in her womb, at that very moment, God the Son became human person.**
  
- ❖ The Incarnation occurred at conception – not sometime later in the third trimester when the fetus became "viable". **The Son of God was once a microscopic embryo. That fact alone gives dignity to every human being in the embryonic stage of life.**
  - ▶ Think about it. **If Jesus's incarnate life began at conception, then it's safe to say that all human life begins at conception.** If Jesus was once an embryo, then how can we justify treating any embryo as mere human tissue or simple surgical waste?
  
- ❖ That's why I believe a consistent Christian worldview leads you to the conviction that the unborn are a particular group of human persons to whom the duty in Proverbs 24:11 would apply. We have no basis to place the unborn in a subhuman class, and thereby disqualify them from this duty to rescue.
  - ▶ These are, in fact, little human persons being taken away to death. They are stumbling to the slaughter. **Therefore, we who fear God ought to do whatever we can to intervene on their behalf and rescue these little ones from peril.**

### **The Duty at Hand**

- ❖ *But what can we do? What does this duty to rescue look like for us?* **Some people think if you're going to do something about abortion then you'll have to get political.** But that's not the case. While I do hope more Christians with deep convictions do address the issue politically, **I believe there's a more fundamental and universal duty we can all engage.**
  - ▶ You see, in spite of all the legislative efforts by the pro-life movement over the past 44 years, we still face a sizable challenge ahead of us. And it's because, for the most part, the general public doesn't really care about abortion.

- ❖ **Our first duty at hand in rescuing the unborn is educating people on the true nature of abortion – starting with ourselves.** You can start by reading one of the books I’ve recommended in the outline.
- ❖ But I also recommend taking an even bolder step. This might shock you, but **I recommend seeing the horrors of abortion with your own eyes.** I’m talking about looking at photos of aborted babies. I understand the idea is repulsive and perhaps even offensive to you.
  - ▶ I, for one, always thought it was too extreme and counterproductive when pro-lifers would use graphic photos of abortions in their campaigns. I always used to think, *“How could you be so insensitive to show these kinds of graphic photos?”*
- ❖ But that’s before I visited the Houston Holocaust Museum. And there I was shocked and bit repulsed when I came across these grim photos of Holocaust victims – piles of dead bodies right outside a gas chamber. But then it hit me.
  - ▶ You could ask the same question. How can the museum be so insensitive to show these photos? But it’s intentional. It’s intended to educate the American public on the true horrors of the Holocaust. Reading about it is one thing; seeing it with your own eyes is another.
- ❖ So instead of asking, *“How can anyone be so insensitive to show these graphic photos?”* We should be asking, *“How can anyone be so insensitive to justify what is being graphically shown in these photos?”* It’s moral insanity if we feel more repulsion towards those who are showing the photos than we do towards what the photos actually show. We need to educate people, again starting with ourselves.
- ❖ Here’s another practical application. **Consider serving at a local crisis pregnancy center.** I’ve had the privilege of getting to know the director of the Houston Pregnancy Health Center in Midtown<sup>3</sup>. She’s told me they get plenty of young Chinese women seeking help. And it saddened me when she said, from their experience, their Chinese clients tend to have their minds pretty much made up. They were the hardest to counsel towards keeping the baby.
  - ▶ She was pleading for the Chinese Church to send more volunteers who could bridge the language and cultural barriers. We talked about how these Chinese women grew up in a shame-based culture with so much pressure to succeed professionally.
- ❖ **Cultural observers tell us that most women who get an abortion know full well they’re taking a human life.** But they go through with it anyways because they’re convinced that “by having this baby my life will be over”. In their minds it’s a choice between me or the baby. Someone’s life will be over. That’s truly how they feel.

---

<sup>3</sup> [www.houstonpregnancyhelpcenter.org](http://www.houstonpregnancyhelpcenter.org)

- ❖ It doesn't justify abortion, but Christians need to be more sensitive to women who feel trapped in this position. **Instead of raining down condemnation, we need to rain down compassion and help them see abortion's harm not just to the baby but to themselves.**
  - ▶ And we need to pray for God to rain down his grace on these women and any who have made the sorrowful choice of aborting her child in the past. Let's rain down a message of hope.
    - **Reminding her – and reminding one another – that those who have sacrificed their sons and daughters on the altar of personal liberty can find forgiveness in the Son of God who took the liberty to sacrifice himself on the cross for us and for our sins.** This is the word of grace we preached to begin this message and the same word to end it.