

The Value of Human Life

Matthew 10:27-31

In this passage Jesus teaches His disciples that we should fear no one but God. He says quite clearly that while men can kill the body, only God can destroy the soul. Then He uses an interesting illustration to show the care God has for mankind. He reminds His disciples of the lowly sparrow, a very common bird, a bird so common that in the time of Jesus a copper coin could buy two of them. "Do not fear", the Master says, "You are of more value than many sparrows".

In recent times we have witnessed the complete lack of value some place upon human life. In the Middle East, Hamas terrorists strap bombs to their bodies and blow themselves up in the name of Allah. Unfortunately, they also blow up anyone who is close enough to them. By turning themselves into human explosives they try to take out as many people as possible. On September 11, 2001 terrorists killed thousands of innocent people in airplanes, building, or on the ground. They also killed themselves, and for what? The reason is because they didn't care for human life. Scientists in our own country are continually trying to clone human beings and with some success. The reckless attempts highlight a division in our populace. Some are opposed on moral grounds while others assert that the ends justify the means. If cloned humans can help scientists conquer diseases they say, then the efforts are worthwhile. But, what happens to the sanctity of human life? An indication of how far our society has gone in the denigration of human life is the untold millions of abortions legally performed in this country since 1973. Other indicators of the undervaluation of human life consist of the multitudes of persons in our own country without homes, jobs, or hope.

What does Jesus have to say about the value of human life? What words can we turn to in order to rectify the situation we are faced with? Does Jesus offer any hope?

In Mark 8:34-38 Jesus speaks of the sacrifices we must make in order to be His disciples. He tells us we must first desire to come after Him. Once the desire is indicated our actions determine whether or not we will be His disciples. We must in turn, deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him. Jesus then asks a haunting question, "For what shall it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" Again, He asks, "What will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

There are far too many people in our world who do not comprehend the value of their soul. Too many people are bowing down before the altar of wealth, health, popularity, and fame. In answer to Jesus' question, they indicate that they are willing to give very little in exchange for their souls. No amount of money, fame, or prestige is worth losing your soul. Because many people have no concept of the value of human life, they spend their days acquiring possessions that are temporal, not eternal.

The Lord placed the highest value upon human life. He understood that the same God who cares for the sparrows of the field cares for the crown of creation. As Jesus indicated in Matthew 6:25-34, we humans should not worry about food, drink, clothing, or even our life. He uses the birds of the air and the lilies of the field as concrete examples. Since God provides for them He will also provide for us. Jesus recognizes the relative impotence of man. Even though we worry about many things, especially things of this world, we are unable through our worrying to do a single thing about them, even something as mundane as increasing our height by an inch or two. Truly we many times manifest what Jesus calls "little faith".

We are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). By this it does not mean that we look like God, but rather that in some ways we have a little bit of God in us. God made man to rule the world, he created everything for man, and yet man disregarded God. The same is true today, especially in the lack of value that is placed upon human life. Jesus knew the true purpose of man. In one of His disputes with the Jews (John 10:31-39) He quoted Psalm 82:6, where David had said, "I said, "You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High". Yes, Jesus placed a high value on human life.

Because of the high value Jesus placed on human life we should pay more earnest heed to the terrible condition of a life that resists divine guidance. Jesus used several descriptive words and phrases to show the folly and awfulness of sin.

In Luke 15:11-32 we read the parable of the lost, or prodigal son. This son, Jesus said, took his inheritance and traveled away from his father into a far country. While in this far country the son wasted all of his possessions and suffered greatly when a famine struck that land. If the son had stayed in the far country he would have perished. The same is true of us. When we leave the territory of God and strike out on our own into the far country of sin, when we trust in our own resources for our needs, when we indulge in riotous living, then our situation parallels that of the prodigal son. It is only when we return to the Father's house that we can survive.

In Matthew 13:36-42 Jesus explains the parable of the wheat and the tares. A farmer had planted his field in wheat but during the night one of his enemies had also come and sown weeds. When the deed was discovered the servants wanted to go out and pull up the weeds, but the master would not let them. He said, "Wait until the harvest". Jesus then describes the final judgment, "The Son of Man will send out His angels, and

they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (verses 41-42). There are many who would never dream of going into a far country like the prodigal son, but who are just as unproductive. They are members of the church in name only, and Jesus accurately describes them as weeds that will be gathered out of the kingdom at the last day.

In Matthew 22:1-14 Jesus gives the parable of the wedding feast. In this parable a man planned a wedding for his son. He sent the servants out to spread the news, but they returned with reports of all of the excuses why people wouldn't come to the wedding. The king sent them out again with the command to invite people in the highways both good and bad. One of those who came to the wedding was found without a wedding garment and was bound and cast into outer darkness. In this parable we see the absolute necessity of making the proper preparations for attending the wedding that God has planned.

But Jesus knew that mankind could be saved. Jesus was able to look into the future and see the trials and tribulations of man, and also the redemption made possible by His broken body and shed blood. Jesus saw the good in people, even people that were looked upon by their contemporaries as beneath contempt.

One of these people was Zaccheus, a tax collector. In Luke 19:1-10 we find the account of Jesus stopping under the tree where Zaccheus had climbed to see Him. Jesus went to his house and this prompted the self-righteous to say, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner" (verse 7). True, Zaccheus was a sinner, but so are all of us. Jesus saw the good that was in Zaccheus and built upon it.

Another class of people that Jesus associated with was harlots. In Luke 7:36-50 Jesus went to eat in the house of Simon, a Pharisee. While they were eating a woman came in, uninvited, and began to weep. She washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and dried them with her hair. Simon thought within himself that Jesus could not be a prophet since He allowed this "sinner" to touch Him. Jesus used this thought process to illustrate an important truth. He told the story of two debtors. They both were in debt to the same man but one debtor owed ten times more than the other. The man to whom the debt was owed forgave them both. Jesus asked, "which of them will love him more?" (verse 42). Simon correctly identified the one who owed the most. Jesus then forgave the sins of the "sinful" woman. He saw the good in her.

An interesting highlight in this account is the question of Jesus to Simon in verse 44, "Do you see this woman"? Certainly Simon could not have avoided seeing the woman making such a scene in his house, but had he really "seen" the woman? Simon saw only the outward appearance, the fact that she was a sinner. Jesus saw something else, He saw a person that needed hope. Today, the church must "see" those who are in need and minister to them.

Jesus recorded the prayers of two contrasting systems in Luke 18:9-14. On the one hand we have the system of self-righteousness reflected in the prayer of the Pharisee. His prayer is a litany of why he should be rewarded. On the other hand is the humble prayer of the publican. The publicans were minor Roman officials in Judea, they were held in contempt by the Jews. But, his prayer, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" was heard and answered by God. A simple trusting faith based upon the grace and love of God is held up by Jesus as the exemplar.

Jesus used the despised Samaritan to drive His point home in Luke 10:25-37. Once again we see two conflicting systems, on the one hand we see the self-righteousness of the priest and the Levite, each of whom when they saw a person in need passed by on the other side. Opposed to this is the system exemplified by the Samaritan who took the steps to help. Jesus saw the good in all. He was known as a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 11:19). Not that Jesus condoned their sin, but rather he did not condemn them solely on the basis of who they were. Jesus saw the good in all of us.

The priest and the Levite saw but they did not really "see". They made a value judgment based upon a false assessment of the worth of the man in the ditch. It was only the Samaritan that really "saw". He was the one who acted in an appropriate way in the situation. How many of us today are like the priest and the Levite? We are confronted daily with those who are in the ditch. There are multitudes of people in our world needing a blessing and too often we pass by on the other side. It is only when we come to understand the value of human life that we will be in a position to make an impact on those without hope in the world.

Jesus came to give life (John 10:10), the disciples were sent out to bear witness of the life found in Him (Matthew 28:16-20). As the bible shows, God values human life. In the most well-known verse of scripture says, "God so loved the world..." (John 3:16). Paul wrote of this (1 Corinthians 6:20), Peter wrote of this (1 Peter 1:18-19), and John had this truth revealed to him (Revelation 1:5). We should always understand the value of human life, especially in these perilous times.