

The Wee Ones and Christ

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[0 : 00] Now, for those maybe who haven't been here over the last number of weeks, occasionally it was in the evening, or once it was in the evening, but the rest in the morning, we've been doing a short series, I've been doing a short series of teaching about planning and praying in our lives.

So the importance of planning Christ and the gospel into our lives, both personally and as a church, and in the world in which we live, being thoughtful and positive and thinking through who we are and why we believe what we do, and praying about all of that.

So it's about really thinking through who we are and being positive in seeking growth and seeking development and seeking to make a difference, taking initiative spiritually in our lives rather than sometimes just treading water or just being in a rut.

It's that focus of moving forward, both individually as a church and also within the society in which we live. And I wanted to finish the series with two potentially controversial, well not controversial subjects, but ones that are not often preached about with the view of we've looked at planning and praying our life individually, committing our lives to prayer as a church, praying for the city in which we live, we looked at that last week.

And today I want to think about two issues, or I want to think about one issue and next week, another issue that are significant for us in the society in which we live and how we deal with them as believers.

[1 : 48] Today we're going to look at abortion and next Sunday morning God willing we look at how we can reach into the LGBT community with the gospel of grace and love of Jesus Christ as it seems very often to be shut off to us because of their maybe preconceptions of the gospel and sometimes our preconceptions of them.

So it's really about, today it's about the whole subject and I recognize it's a sensitive and a difficult subject really to speak about. The title was The Wee Ones and Christ.

And I didn't, I made that title, but I didn't realize till this week that the Latin for little ones is fetus, or fetus is the Latin for little one.

So the wee ones, the Scottish version of that, the wee ones, the little ones for Christ. And I want to think about that today as we focus our prayer life and our spiritual life as believers in the church and in the city to which we belong.

Now I recognize and I know that in the society in which we live abortion is really a given in most circles.

[3 : 07] It's not really up for discussion in many places whatsoever and the rights of a woman to do what she must do with her own body is a basic, seen as a basic human right completely normalized in the society in which we live.

Now I know and I recognize that I've only got 25 minutes. It's a huge subject. You could address it in lots of different ways. You could come at it from lots of different angles.

I'm not going to do a lot of statistics. I'm not going to integrate detail in various ways. But I would encourage you as a Christian to be informed about it.

It's really important to be informed. And if you're not a Christian to consider some of the things that maybe you'll be challenged to think about today.

So my initial question is why do we need to pray about this? Because the whole focus of this series is praying, planning, praying into action, not praying in a kind of monastic way, praying from a distance and then just getting on with things but praying in a positive way.

[4 : 23] Why do we need to pray? I think we need to pray because as Christians we've got a God-centered view of the universe. A God-centered view of the universe that vitally clashes with the philosophical mindset of the day and generation which we live.

And we know that very few people care about that. Very few people care about the view that we would have of God and of God as the Creator in the universe. So we need to pray about that.

I think we need to pray because we need to know how to speak into a secular society about abortion in a gospel-centered way.

That's hugely significant. I simply don't think shouting the loudest or condemning from the parapets is the way that we deal with issues that we find morally difficult to deal with.

And I don't think we need to move beyond silence and we need to move beyond separatist rage and I don't have the answers which is why I'm encouraging myself and all of us to pray.

[5 : 33] I've got many questions. I think we need to pray because we need God's wisdom to engage with society again and individuals to consider why it is seen as worthy in a sense of celebration that removing life from the womb is a positive response from a liberal and sophisticated society.

And I think we need to pray in repentance. Repentance is confessing our own sins, repent for our lack of concern for life after birth and to be challenged about the cost of our responsibilities if we believe in the value of every born life, to repent of a careless and disinterested and insular and selfish and pleasure-seeking life that sometimes we do when there's so much hurt and pain and suffering in the world in which we live.

So that's, I think, some of the reasons we need to pray and I'm going to come back to that at the end. What does God say about human life? Now, we didn't have a reading from Scripture today because I'm going to take various readings. So it's a theme today rather than working through a specific passage of Scripture.

And so we're picking different truths from throughout the Bible about this. What does God say about human life? Well, that, we go back to the very beginning for that, for Genesis 1, 26, 27.

Then God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

[7 : 06] So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them male and female, He created them. That's the very beginning of the Bible, it's very foundational for us and it's very important for us to recognize that that's there for a reason.

It's our starting point. Life matters for us in this world because God breathed life into us and humanity bears God's image. Now there's a huge, there's another 20 sermons within that itself, whatever it fully means to be image bearers of God, it's certainly no less than being people who are morally accountable to the God who made us, who are beautifully reflective of His image, who are sentient, creative, relational, self-conscious, with a sense of a never-ending existence as image bearers of God, the triune God, who gives, and that for us gives us dignity and purpose and belonging and a propensity to worship.

We feel we need to worship the living God because it's with it, it's just built within us as those made in His image. And within, you know, within the expression of marital love is the procreative act, which is the coming together of two people who love, and there within that is the forming of a glorious, mysterious, intricate, awe-inspiring, unique and precious being, image bearing its parents who in turn image bear their parents and the God who made us.

So we go back to the beginning to be image bearers, and that image bearing we believe from Scripture begins at conception. The life begins at conception morally, ethically, spiritually, if not legally, in the world in which we live.

Matthew 1 verse 20 speaks of the coming of Jesus, as you consider these things, Joseph, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

[9 : 18] The Jesus we know from the biblical account is conceived miraculously, but that is when his life began as our Savior with all the mystery of that.

Saying that we attribute to Jesus' humanity all our theology, all the significance of him being a representative of the human race, all the suffering that he went on to experience, all that enabled him to know what it was to be a human being began at conception.

He didn't fall into the manger, boom. He didn't arrive in some divine chariot at the age of 30 years of age to do his public ministry and then head back to heaven.

He was conceived in the womb of Mary as an individual unique in every way. And there's not only the postnatal life of Jesus and of others in Scripture, there's also prenatal references at different points.

We sung some verses, or I mentioned some verses at the beginning, I want to finish by singing verses from Psalm 139, but in Psalm 139 verses 13 to 16, this amazing message of the psalmist for you formed my inward parts, you knitted me together in my mother's womb.

[10 : 39] I praise you for I'm fearful and wonderfully made wonderful are your works, my soul knows it well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Isaiah 49 verse 1, listen to me O customs and give attention you peoples from afar. The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother He named my name.

These prenatal recognitions of the individual within Scripture, the complete and unique creation from conception of a new individual with all its unique DNA code from the very beginning, the color of their hair, the color of their eyes, the way that they're likely to think fully dependent at this point on its mother, absolutely internal, completely, but also distinct.

That life is not a kidney, it is not a liver, it is an individual life, fully dependent on its mother.

And that conception reality, bearing the image of God seen in Jesus Christ, gives equality and value to all of human life.

[11 : 55] It gives the basis, the foundation for our respect, worth, uniqueness, the rights and the responsibilities of every human being. You know, no matter how unpromising or unhelpful that life might appear, the child in the womb is the image bearer of God, like each of us within our mother's womb, the image bearer of God, that safest and most protected of all environments in the world in which we live.

But when God is taken out of the equation in a materialistic world, human life is still valued, but it's not sacred. And it doesn't have this foundational reality of being made in the image of a divine being.

And nothing, therefore, external on which to base our value and even our equality. You know, that there's no Creator.

There can be no moral accountability outside of ourselves. Where would it come from if there was nothing except the world in which we live and nothing except the material world, so that utilitarianism, usefulness becomes one of the great foundations or feelings or whatever developed social strata and structures are based on the individual human right becomes significant.

Who decides these things? Who decides who has rights and who has responsibilities? What happens when these, in community, when these rights clash?

[13 : 27] And ultimately, why defend the weak and the vulnerable, the costly and the sick in a world without ultimate value?

A Hubert Humphrey building dedication in November 1, 1977, Washington, D.C. Former Vice President Humphrey spoke about the treatment of the weakest members of society as a reflection of a government.

Now, I don't know if his quote of his was original to him. It seems to have been flowing about a lot of places over a lot of time, but I couldn't find any further originality beyond him.

The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children, those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly, those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy, and the disabled.

I agree with that. And I think that comes soundly from biblical principles and a recognition of the image of God.

[14 : 31] So we're made in the image of God, but we are broken image bearers. We also recognize that, don't we, as Christians? That's the message of the Bible. The tragedy of humanity is that we have rejected God and rejected His love and His life and are under the just judgment of death, separation from God and from life.

We're dying. We're not dead, we're dying. Death and destruction, taint, overtake, and mar every aspect and characteristic of life that we rightly celebrate.

We celebrate so much and it's good to celebrate, and it's good to celebrate life and the common grace of God and the beauty of what we see around us, but we do recognize that that celebration and our lives are at best fragile.

All of us are lives that are at best fragile. And there's always this shadow that feeds into our longing. There's a shadow, we feel, or an image in life that feeds into our longing for something more wholesome, more permanent, with more meaning and belonging and identity and hope.

Because death brings a despair and a hopelessness, and it's a spiritual problem. It's not ultimately a medical or a physical one.

[15 : 49] It's a spiritual reality for us. And our Christians can't be, and we mustn't be idealistic in a naive way. We know we don't live in a sanitized world.

We know it's not clean cut world of happy families skipping around with sugary sweet smiles. It's a broken world, it's a world of abuse and division and selfishness and exploitation and greed and hate that infuses all the goodness and the beauty and the love that we also see in the lives that we live.

So we live in a broken world, and we need to apply our grace into a broken world. The greatest danger for us, again I repeat this, making easy moral judgments from the grandstands that ignore our own broken hearts and our needs and the pain of not just our lives but the lives of others around us who make difficult, traumatic, wrong or confused choices.

We don't wag our fingers from a distance rubbing our hands at their folly because we know more than anyone we should that we are broken image bearers at Romans 3.23 reminds us of that, all of sinned, all of sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

It's a spiritual problem. We also know that Christ brings restoration into this brokenness. That's the message of the gospel, it's the message that we preach, that we hope to live and that we hope to put into practice in our lives.

[17 : 21] Now the bulletin sheet has a longer version of what I'm going to read here from verse 30 but we're going to read from verse 39. This is Luke chapter 1 again going back to the birth of Jesus.

In those days Mary arose and went with haste to the hill country to a town called Emdura and there entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, Elizabeth is Mary's cousin.

The baby leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me for behold when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leapt for joy. As a she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

And it's a beautiful declaration of the gospel message from within the womb. Isn't that interesting that Jesus in the womb causes John his cousin in the womb to leap for joy with the good news that Christ was going to be the Lord of Mary and Elizabeth and everyone who believed.

[18 : 42] The hope of forgiveness, of understanding life and suffering and death and restoration and healing. It says out of the mouths of babes, even before birth there's this amazing prenatal praise for the coming of Jesus.

And in his life that we know of, his public ministry from the age of 30, who did he consistently reach out to? The broken, the vulnerable, the outsiders in society, women, the insignificant, the margin of lies, those rich or poor who were aware of their own spiritual need, who were broken, who felt sinful and lost and guilty.

And he came to them. That's who Jesus came to. And in his death he bridged a gap that needed to be bridged.

The cross isn't a hypothetical quick fix for us. It's not a realignment of, oh, this great moral leader died in a cross.

Spiritual need to make something religious and significant from it to make right what was done wrong. This is Jesus Christ who from before the creation of the world did this in his purpose and his plan because he is the answer to death and we sung at the beginning of the resurrection which we celebrate every Lord's day, which is the first day of the resurrection morning because Jesus himself was exposed to the full extent of the brutality and the judgment and the horror of death and the wrath of God and ultimate forsakenness in our place.

[20 : 25] So the gospel always for us must be the starting point to unravel the illogicality of abortion.

It's always the gospel. It must always be the gospel that Jesus came to of. We are not to be moralists, we are not simply ethicists, we are those who believe in the power of the gospel to transform and to change.

Therefore I close with returning to prayer, planning to pray. So I probably haven't made this very clear but I am wanting us to think specifically, to pray specifically over the next year deliberately, consciously, regularly about the gospel changing our lives individually, congregationally as a community and in this is how we live in the society in which we live with the gospel.

And to me this is an area where I have so many questions and know the great need for prayer. Coming to Christ Jesus for prayer, to cry for mercy and to come to Him with some of our questions provoking a response of grace.

And I finish with some of these questions. I am not going to give answers because I don't have them. How do we reach out as we pray with this question, how can we reach out in love to women who despair of their situation of bringing a child into an abusive home?

[21 : 53] How can we do that? How can we speak to those riddled with guilt over past procedure, broken and grieving, those who don't recognize it as a life, those who recognize it as their right?

How do we deal? How do we pray into that? How do we cope as people? How do we protect and pray for wisdom to protect the rights of women, value them, but also defend the rights of the unborn girl, the unborn child, the voiceless, the most vulnerable?

How do we do that? What value as we pray and question, what value do we place on life after birth? Do we care equally about the squalor and poverty and abuse and rejection of children in the world in which we live?

And others, not just children. It doesn't just, it begins at conception, but it doesn't end at birth. A responsibility doesn't end there.

It's almost like becoming, definitely becoming a Christian. People become a Christian sometimes, well that's fine, they become a Christian now. And we just leave them to go on with their life with God. It's only the beginning of the Christian walk, which is why we'll preach about discipleship for the next six or seven weeks.

[23 : 11] It's only the beginning of a new life that we walk together in. What about the life of children? And I throw out a huge challenge to families here, Christian families.

Are we on the forefront of adoption and fostering? It's a huge need, massive need. There are so few adopters and fosters in the Highlands that children are driven hundreds of miles to the central belt to find foster homes.

Because there's none in the Highlands. It's just one example. Are we as churches, are we as individuals? Am I, are we at the forefront of that great work?

Do we champion? And how do we champion the great value of parenthood, the spectacular and significant value of the maternal love and the paternal care and the influence for good in the world?

How do we, and I've tried throughout this not to use emotive language, I've tried not to, because I know it's a hugely emotive subject. But how do we get people to consider the barbarity of the actual procedure, which is unspoken of in polite company?

[24 : 35] How do we do that? How do we get across the damage of seeing abortion as a means of contraception?

How can we stop the law of unintended consequences? We see that in the world all the time, don't we? The law of unintended consequences where people, seeing people's value only in what they can offer society, where will be the next step towards infanticide or the destruction which already happening of an unwanted sex, unwanted baby girls, and maybe in some places unwanted baby boys?

How does that get stopped? And how do we rather move towards laws that aim to ensure every child born is fed, loved, secured, and provided for?

How do we do that? How do we pray and support our nurses and our doctors with all the pressure to conform and perform against their ethical and spiritual beliefs in the society in which we live?

Huge pressures. And how do we simply not fall into despair over this matter?

[25 : 48] We cry out into the brokenness with the love and light of Christ. That's all we can do at one level and work out on a one-to-one basis as we have the opportunity of sharing grace and compassion.

And believing at least that heaven is populated by at least 8 million extra souls whose lives will be taken in the womb since the 1967 Law Change Act in the UK.

That's one of our hopes. And praying about how to make a difference. How do we make a difference for good and for the gospel?

And it's something for all of us to consider in the light of the gospel and in the light of what Jesus has done for us. Let's bow our heads and pray.

Father, God help us to live with compassion and with grace and recognize and know our part of belonging to a broken and confused and difficult world.

[27 : 00] And often we are broken and confused and difficult. We're not aloft from it. We're not separate from it. We're not looking down on it. We recognize and see it. We see it in our own churches.

We see it in our own Christian communities. We see it in our own attitudes and in our own lives and in so much of what we do, we pray and ask that you would help us just in all our weakness to cry out for wisdom and for strength and for impossibilities to happen for people to value life so greatly that it transforms and changes even the most difficult of circumstances.

But we do cry to you, Lord, because we don't have the answers. We certainly don't have all the answers. And we pray for wisdom and humanity and humility and ask that at a very practical level in our lives that we would make a difference, one to one.

Very few of us will have the opportunity to do kind of remarkable things that will change society, but we do in Christ know that we can change our own circumstances and the life around us by grace and by our attitudes and our responses and our choices.

We pray for those that are broken themselves here, secret, hurt and pain and sorrow.

[28 : 29] We ask this wouldn't be a place of sniveling kind of unnatural, judgmental or careless spirit or thoughtlessness that we would reach out to one another and confess our needs and seek our support and love from one another.

Help us to be a real community, we pray and bless us in our worship as we conclude our worship today, publicly singing in praise and honour of the God of life.

Amen.