

BE CELEBRATIVE OF LIFE**EXODUS 20:13**

Do you remember that picture? That's Alan Kurdi, a three year old Syrian boy of Kurdish ethnic background, who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea back in September 2015. He and his family were refugees trying to escape the chaos in Syria and reach safety in Europe. That one picture went all over the world and brought fresh awareness to the growing refugee crisis. But there's a kind of irony about it, too. The fact is that thousands of children die tragically every day all over the world – from hunger, from disease, from abuse, from abortion, from murder – but we don't give their deaths that much thought. For some reason, however, we are captivated and moved by the story of one little boy's tragic death. Why? Deep down in the human spirit there's a recognition that life is precious and sacred. Few of us can comprehend thousands of children dying every day all over the world. Our minds just can't absorb it. But we can identify with the plight of one little boy whose life was tragically cut short. Who put that fascination with life deep inside our hearts? God did. Life is sacred. Only God can give it.

We're half way through our reflection on God's Big Ten – the Ten Commandments. Ten statements given by God to Israel through Moses some 3,500 years ago intended to enhance and enrich our lives, not limit them in any way. But they are indeed laws, not just suggestions. They're authoritative for everyone, everywhere, every day. Today we consider number six of God's Big Ten – the Ten Commandments. But before we drill down on that one, let's read all of them. Now, number six is very brief and to the point: "You must not murder." (Ex. 20:13 NLT) This commandment implies and assumes physical life is something to be celebrated and valued as very precious because only God can give it. Therefore, taking it away illegitimately is prohibited.

Before we consider what this command does address, let me dismiss three applications of it that are always wrong because, if true, it means God contradicts Himself. First, this commandment doesn't forbid the killing of animals. God actually sanctioned the killing of animals as sacrifices in Old Testament worship. Nor is there any prohibition against eating animals. Clearly, what God had in mind here was the illegitimate taking of human life not whether it's OK to kill animals or not. Second, this commandment doesn't forbid capital punishment. In fact, elsewhere in the Old Testament God ordained capital punishment for several sins or crimes. Third, this commandment doesn't forbid going to war and killing enemy soldiers in combat. In many places in the Old Testament, God instructed the Israelites to kill their enemies. You may well argue the pros and cons of those three issues from other Scriptures – be my guest - but don't force this commandment to apply to them. It's very important not to force the Bible to support your perspective or to address subjects it never intended to address. How, then, should number six be applied? Because we celebrate life, there are some things...

WHAT WE MUST NEVER OVERLOOK.

The most obvious meaning of this commandment is the fact God says NO to pre-meditated murder. The word sometimes translated "kill" is actually a rather rare Hebrew word that means murder. This is a very specific command, then, not just a general

prohibition against any and all forms of taking someone's life. The Old Testament even distinguished against killing a person intentionally and accidentally. We live in a culture where murder is still regarded as a crime; nevertheless, it's become somewhat commonplace. For too many, human life has become cheap and expendable. Too much murder is found in the home and in the family. The first murder occurred in a family, didn't it? Caleb murdered his brother, Abel. Obviously, pre-meditated murder is something neither God nor we should ever overlook.

Another appropriate application of this command is the fact God says NO to suicide. The most recent statistics from 2016 reveal suicide was the tenth leading cause of death overall in the United States, claiming the lives of nearly 45,000 people. Suicide was the second leading cause of death among individuals between the ages of 10 and 34. Some people's attitude seems to be, "It's my life and I have a right to live it or end it." God says, "No, you don't. I gave you your life and only I have the right to take it away." The Bible makes it clear God and only God should determine how long you live. It says, "You (God) have decided the length of our lives. You know how many months we will live, and we are not given a minute longer." (Job 14:5 NLT) Can a genuine Christian commit suicide in a moment of mental illness or even deep discouragement? Yes, I'm sure that's happened, and – no – that act doesn't somehow disqualify him or her from being in Heaven as I understand Scripture.

But suicide can never be God's will for anyone at any time. We belong to God, not to ourselves. We've been bought with a price – the blood of Jesus – and we're precious to God. If you've ever considered suicide – or you're being tempted strongly to commit suicide – there's hope in Jesus Christ. You matter so much to God. God made you for a purpose. He cares about you, loves you, and will bring you through this dark time if you hold on to Him. Have you ever been at the beach when the tide goes out? It can be kind of ugly. There's all this junk the ocean washes up on the shore. But when the tide comes back in, it covers over all that mess. The tide might be out in your life today – all you see is the mess – but it will come back in. Hold on to God. Trust Him.

Because of this command, we can safely assume God says NO to mercy killing or euthanasia. This is the deliberate ending of someone's life because they're in great pain, have an incurable disease, suffer a terrible deformity, or are getting very old. There's a growing segment in our society that believe doctors should have the right to put people to death legally. Now, this command in no way applies to the decision to allow someone to die whose life is being extended artificially or to let someone die peacefully of natural causes. Instead, so-called mercy killing is causing the death of someone else deliberately because you've determined he or she no longer enjoys an appropriate quality of life, or has become inconvenient, or is in too much pain. God says you don't have the right to make that decision. God hasn't given any doctor that kind of authority. God hasn't even given any person that kind of authority over his or her own life. Instead, the Bible says, "For the life of every living thing is in his (God's) hand, and the breath of every human being." (Job 12:10 NLT)

Some will disagree, but I believe this command means God says NO to abortion. The statistics still ought to stagger the imagination. Every year the lives of approximately 900,000 unborn babies in America are being snuffed out. 97% of abortions aren't because of rape, incest, or concerns over the mother's health, but instead because someone's determined an unborn human being is inconvenient. More human beings have died in abortion clinics since 1973 than in all of our nation's wars put together. If you believe what science indicates - viable life begins in the womb - then abortion is a form of murder. So when does life begin? Why not allow the Author of life to answer that question? "You (God) made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!" (Ps. 139:13-14 NLT) To the prophet Jeremiah, God said, "I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb." (Jer. 1:5 NLT) You might say, "But, Rick, lots of pregnancies are unplanned." Maybe so, but if God is the ultimate Author of life, there are no accidental conceptions. God has a purpose for each and every human being even though we don't know it. A fetus is not a blob of tissue; it's a life – a person - created and planned by God and made in His image. You might say, "But, Rick, no child should be brought into this world unwanted." Even if his or her parents don't want a child, God does! From God's perspective, there's never been an unwanted child.

Let me hasten to say I don't stand in judgment upon any woman here today or out there who's had an abortion. I'm not here to shame you or heap condemnation upon you. I'm a fellow sinner. Instead, I simply want to share the good news that you can repent of the sin of having an abortion just like any other sin. God will completely forgive you, remove your guilt, and put you to work in His Kingdom. Did you know a major portion of the Bible was written by three murderers? Moses murdered an Egyptian, David essentially murdered Uriah, and Paul was complicit in the murder of Stephen. Whether it's the sin of abortion – or any other sin – don't let a past failure undermine your relationship with God today or tomorrow. God's grace is greater than all our sin, isn't it?

Here's something else we can't overlook because of this command. God says NO to all personal hatred. It was Jesus Himself who intensified and deepened the meaning of number six in God's Big Ten when He said, "You have heard that our ancestors were told, "You must not murder."... But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell." (Mt. 5:21-22 NLT) In the same way Jesus said lust after someone is like committing adultery, so also hating someone is like committing murder. The Bible also says, "Anyone who hates another brother or sister is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers don't have eternal life within them." (1 Jo. 3:15 NLT) Don't allow yourself to say you hate another person. Don't allow your kids or grandkids to say they hate you or hate someone else in a fit of anger. Don't minimize, excuse, or overlook hatred particularly in yourself. Hate is serious stuff to God. Hate cuts you off from God. The Holy Spirit can't indwell a hate-filled, hate-controlled person – it's impossible.

By implication, this sixth commandment means God says NO to anything that undermines the intrinsic dignity and value of human beings. As followers of Jesus, we

need to be far more concerned about being consistently pro-life, than whether we identify with so called “conservative” or “liberal, progressive” values or whether we vote Republican or Democrat in November. Frankly, I’m not convinced either political party is biblically pro-life. Both are selectively pro-life in my humble estimation. What does it mean to be biblically pro-life? It means we see any and every person as someone made in the image of God and someone for whom Jesus died and rose again. If you’re passionate about ending abortion (and you should be), you have just as much reason to be passionate about racial injustice, or ending hunger, or supporting adoption, or resisting any exploitation of the poor, or treating homosexuals respectfully, or protecting the human dignity of refugees and immigrants. Take racism as one example. If you buy into the notion that certain races or ethnic groups are not as precious to God as others, you’re basically saying God got it all wrong. If He is the Author of all human life, then every person of every race possesses intrinsic, God-given dignity and value equal to you and your race. Every child is as important to God as your child. Every refugee or immigrant is as important to God as you are. Do you believe that? Do you teach your kids or grandkids that biblical truth and live it out? Celebrating life means there are just some things we can never condone. By the same token, there are some things ...

WHAT WE MUST ALWAYS PROMOTE.

Please don’t get the idea celebrating life is only a matter of not condoning certain things. On the contrary, it ought to be an active, positive promoting of all God intends for life and living. First of all, celebrating life as God intended suggests recognizing and respecting God’s gift of physical life. As I said a moment ago, it means acknowledging every human being is made in God’s image and is someone for whom Jesus died and rose again. But let’s take it one step further. Every human life is to be valued and protected because every human being is God’s property ultimately. That’s precisely why murder, suicide, abortion, euthanasia, hate, and treating other human beings disrespectfully is – in reality – an attack on God Himself.

Someone has observed, “Man is God in effigy.” Do you know what an effigy is? That’s when someone who doesn’t like some political leader, often a President, gets some straw or whatever and stuffs it into an old suit, puts a sign around it that reads “Donald Trump” or “Barack Obama,” and then burns, hangs, stomps on, or somehow abuses the effigy. Pretty insulting thing to do. Even though it’s just an effigy stuffed with straw, the effigy represents that person and what he or she stands for. If human beings are God’s effigy – if we’re made in His image and likeness – then when we fail to credit any human being with his or her rightful dignity, we insult God Himself.

Recognizing and respecting God’s gift of physical life means promoting life in a positive way. If you oppose abortion, get involved in a ministry like Pregnancy Decision Health Center here in town or foster a child. If you’re passionate about hunger, support the Mid-Ohio Food Bank. If you despise racism, why not intentionally develop a friendship with someone from a different racial or ethnic identity than yourself? Like many of you, I believe homosexual intimacy is sinful, but are we open and available to develop a genuine friendship with a gay person? Why not? Because people are sinful, they

somewhat lose their dignity and value to God? Really? If you believe refugees and immigrants are just as important to God as American citizens, why not help us with our tutoring ministry over at Whispering Oaks? Celebrating life is about more than just not murdering someone! It means a positive, proactive, intentional demonstration that we recognize and respect God's gift of physical life.

Secondly, celebrating life as God intended means receiving and enjoying God's gift of spiritual life. Life is more than biology. When Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (Jo. 10:10 NIV), He was talking about more than physical life. On another occasion, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me." (Jo. 14:6 NLT) Jesus was saying He was the author and giver of spiritual life. The Bible assumes and implies that only human beings have the ability to have a personal relationship with the God of the Universe. Trees are alive. Animals are alive. Yes, God created and gave plants and animals physical life. But they don't have the capacity for a personal relationship with God. That's only available to human beings. Followers of Jesus aren't just nice people who are trying to get a little better morally each day. We're not just people who believe certain things and go to church a lot. The Bible says we're new creatures. "Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" (2 Cor. 5:17 NLT) We've been given a whole new dimension or kind of life. That happened when we turned away from our rebellion against God, acknowledged Jesus' death and resurrection for us, and received the Holy Spirit into our human spirit. That gift of spiritual, supernatural life is offered to everyone and can be received by anyone. But it never happens by accident or without your consent. Do you have a personal relationship with God? Are you spiritually alive? Are you sure?

Thirdly, celebrating life as God intended means sharing God's gift of eternal life. That's why once a month in our worship service, we intentionally highlight evangelism. That's why Michelle was up here earlier today. Our church exists for the lost people who aren't here yet. We want to share with the Northland community God's gift of eternal life and we want to encourage you as you pray for the lost people in your life and look for opportunities to share Jesus with them. As important as physical life is, God has made it clear it's not enough. "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." (Jo. 3:16 NLT) Eternal life is never-ending life. That means it has maximum quantity. Eternal life is also having God's life within you. That's a kind of life that has maximum quality, too. God has made eternal life available to everyone and anyone can receive it like a gift by turning away from your rebellion against God and turning toward His Son, Jesus.

So are you praying for anyone today specifically who's far from God? Are you looking for ways to build a relationship with someone who seems to show little interest in God at the moment? Do you look for opportunities to turn a conversation toward Jesus or faith in some way? Could you tell someone in a minute or two why you're a follower of Jesus? Could you explain to someone else simply and briefly how Jesus made eternal life possible for everyone? Celebrating life means you're ready, willing, and available to share God's gift of eternal life. One man I heard about suffered the unfortunate

experience of witnessing, when he was just a boy, the drowning of another child near a river where he was playing with a group of kids. He heard the scream of a girl who fell into the water. Not knowing how to rescue a drowning person, he could only watch helplessly as she went under. That experience traumatized and transformed him. He made up his mind that day he'd learn how to rescue a drowning person and he'd never lose another one. And he didn't. During his lifetime, he was in four other situations where someone was drowning. He saved each and every one of those people. People without saving faith in Jesus go out into eternity forever cut off from God. God puts His people into the lives of lost people so they can share God's gift of eternal life. He wants us to make the most of any and every opportunity to point lost people to Jesus.

Maybe you're saying to yourself today, "I'm not sure I have eternal life. I can't say with certainty I'll be in Heaven for all eternity." My friend, you can be sure if you have eternal life. The Bible itself says, "I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life." (1 Jo. 5:13 NLT) God wants you to be certain about the greatest possession you can ever have. Nobody gets eternal life automatically. Nobody has a personal relationship with God from day one. You don't evolve into eternal life gradually. Someone was kind enough to share the message of God's gift of eternal life with us – a parent, a church school teacher, a friend, a neighbor, someone at work. And we'd be so thrilled to share that message with you today or any day. That's why we're here. That's why this church exists. We want to celebrate life by sharing God's gift of eternal life with you and everyone else!

When I was on vacation a couple of weeks ago, I watched an episode or two of the reality show, "Life Below Zero." It documents the lives of people who choose to live in the harshest and remotest conditions of the Arctic. Kind of interesting. There's a true story about a young man who went to one of Alaska's remotest areas to find himself among the natural beauties and mysteries of that region. He bought 1400 pounds of provisions, 500 rolls of film, and several notebooks to record his adventures, thoughts, and experiences. The early writing in his journal was exhilarating and exciting. Many days passed as he commented on the beauty of the magnificent scenery. His pictures documented the splendor. But, suddenly, one day the whole tenor of his writing changed. He'd made an awful discovery. He had foolishly overlooked a crucially important detail. He'd made no plan to return to civilization. He was stranded with no way to communicate with the outside world. His journal described the fear he felt eating his last meal. He wrote, "I should have planned for my departure. I'm so sorry." His journal recorded his growing fear and described his growing hunger pains. A search team finally located his emaciated, frozen body many months later.

Jesus came into this world to provide a quantity and a quality of life you can't find in this world by yourself. It's eternal life. It's a gift you will receive if you become His follower. Don't foolishly overlook or reject that all-important decision. One thing is certain: your life on this earth will come to an end. Are you prepared? Where will you spend eternity? In Jesus' Name, I ask you celebrate life as God intended by receiving today – here and now – the gift of God's eternal life.