

*Four Oaks Community Church – Erik Braun, Preaching Pastor*  
Sanctity of Human Life Sunday - 2 Peter 2:1-9  
*January 29, 2006*

**The Legacy of Lot and the Fight for Life**

Let me give you some reasons why I preach a sermon on the sanctity of human life every year, and will continue to do so as long as God allows me to serve as a pastor:

1. I am convinced wholeheartedly on biblical, theological, philosophical, medical, and legal grounds that a baby is a human person made in God's image at all stages of development from the moment of conception and should be treated with the same respect and rights of all other persons in our free society. We live in a society that either does not regard such beings as persons, or does regard them as persons and subjugates their personhood for personal comfort, economic stability, convenience, choice, emotional stability, etc.; and in fact is killing such persons *en masse*. To live in such a society and remain relatively silent and relatively inactive is a sin.
2. I can think of no greater crime against humanity and rebellion against God than the legalized and systematic extermination of an entire class of persons (and that class of persons being those in greatest need of our care and protection). To not use the stewardship of this pulpit and my calling as pastor to prophecy against such crime and rebellion would itself be a sin.
3. To *not* address the sin of abortion publicly in the context of the assembling of God's people and the worship of God would be to deny and ignore our corporate and individual guilt before God, and would withhold the promise of reconciliation and restoration for sinners and the promise of hope and joy through repentance and faith. It would be to withhold the greatest promise from the people in greatest need.
4. To refuse to address sin and destructive forces in our culture, city, churches, and homes for whatever reason - because it might raise the ire of people who might disagree with our convictions, or because it may cause discomfort, be received as politically incorrect, or might diminish my own influence and reputation would be the height of tyranny. It would be placing our own fears of disdain, our collective desire for comfort and convenience, or our desire for influence and reputation over and above the very lives of other persons, namely the 1.3 million unborn Americans who are killed every year in the womb.
5. Because I have ultimate hope in God that he uses His Word, and the Word preached to change hearts through confession and restoration, to inspire His people to love and good deeds, to save those lost in darkness, and bring justice to the needy. I have great hope in the instrument of His activity in the World, namely the Local Church, to accomplish his work by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This week I saw the bumper sticker again that sums up very adequately the state of the abortion debate in America. It is the motto attributed to the founder of Planned Parenthood, Margaret Sanger, and reads “*Every child a wanted child*”. Now, granted, this may not be the driving philosophy or argumentation used by all abortion rights advocates, but I would assert that it is a sentiment rarely challenged in our culture of death. Let us take a moment and ponder the implications of these words.

First, this sentiment affirms that what is at stake is, in fact, *a child*. Increasingly I find less and less resistance to the mounting medical evidence pointing toward the fetus as a living human being. That debate over life has been pushed further back to the earliest stages of development in our striving to harvest embryonic stem cells for various medical therapies. But, for the most part, there is consensus that the fetus is a living being at those stages of development where it is in most danger of being aborted in our society: from the sixth to the 14<sup>th</sup> week (though the child may be killed throughout the pregnancy ala the Supreme Court’s ruling on Roe v. Wade’s companion case, Doe v. Bolton).

In asserting that this is a *child* is not only to accept that it is a living human being, but it is also to tacitly admit to it’s ‘*personhood*’. Now, I do not accept such distinctions over ‘personhood’ in the case of unborn humans anymore than I do in the case of African slaves in antebellum South (remember the famous argument removing the ‘personhood’ of slaves in the Supreme Court’s Dred Scot decision declaring blacks as ‘a subordinate and inferior class of beings’?). All humans belong to the animal kingdom, the phylum chordata, the class mammalia, the order primate, the family hominid, the genus homo, the species sapiens. The distinction over personhood is an ancient, arbitrary, and devilish effort to assert the tyranny of the strong over weak, the rich over the poor, the white over the black, the abled over the disabled, the adult over the child, or what have you.

For the sake of argument, let’s say that such distinctions are valid. I would aver that even with such distinctions, by and large people do ‘personify’ the unborn. And this popular pro-choice bumper sticker is an illustration of this personification. It calls you to sympathize with a living, breathing, suffering, impoverished, unwanted *child*. It personifies the fetus to make its argument compelling. This thing in the womb is a child! No arguments! Of course not, don’t we have fetal homicide laws in 32 states (including Florida, in a restricted sense)? Don’t we have Laci and Connor’s Law, fiercely opposing the wanton disregard for life of a husband and father who takes the life of a woman who is carrying an unborn fetus? Don’t we have neonatal units fighting for the lives of these unborn persons, going through extraordinary measures and exhausting money, research, knowledge to salvage their lives- all the while their cousins are being killed down the hall?

And now, the most devastatingly crass portion of this mantra: **Every child a wanted child**. Webster’s New Word Encyclopedia defines ‘genocide’ as “*The deliberate and systematic destruction of a national, racial, religious, political, cultural, ethnic, or other group defined by the exterminators as unwanted.*” Consider Planned Parenthood’s crassly hateful propaganda in our public schools, running ads stating: “*Babies are loud,*

*smelly, and expensive – unless you want one.” And, by the way, babies are loud, smelly, and expensive even when they are wanted.*

This rhetoric seeks to justify the cold and harsh reality of abortion in America - more than 9 out of 10 abortions are purely elective procedures chosen by parents who simply refuse to be burdened by the imposition of a child. So, are we to justify the killing of any child that is *unwanted* – unborn or born? (By the way, in America this is pure propaganda, there are no ‘unwanted’ children- we have plenty of parents eagerly waiting to adopt, we have more resources, time, energy, ability to care for little ones than any other society that has ever existed!) Can you sport a bumper sticker that reads: *Every toddler a wanted toddler?* Every black a wanted black? Every Jew a wanted Jew? Every Christian a wanted Christian? If you accept this tyranny in one case, be ready to accept this tyranny when it is crouching at your own door.

I say all this to explain why I chose this passage as our text for this morning. I have already preached on the biblical evidence against abortion. I have belabored the theological and philosophical evidence against killing the unborn. I don’t think these arguments are what is needed. As I demonstrated from the sloganeering all around us- we know what is going on. We know what we are doing. We know what is going on in our culture. We know what is laying siege to our homes, our churches, our schools, our hospitals, our government. So, I won’t spend any more time in strict argumentation. I want to spend some time in a call to action.

I have chosen a rather grim passage for us to sit under this morning as we consider our efforts and duties in protecting the sanctity of human life. Here in 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter the Apostle is reminding his readers that there have always been false teachers amongst or surrounding God’s people, and he promises that such men and women will always plague human society and the church. Peter reminds God’s people that all nations are just a drop in the bucket before a sovereign God, that all governments, leaders, and people will be called to account for their rulings, teachings, actions, words, and thoughts. We are given the examples of two societies in God’s Word that stood as illustrations of a coming and final judgment before a just and holy God. In these societies was a clear assault on the holiness of God, upon truth, justice, and righteousness. In each society there was an escalating wickedness that engulfed all who stood before it. In each society there were a righteous few who stood against the wickedness of the age, understanding the day of judgment that would come. The first example Peter provides is Noah in the days before the great flood. The second example is Lot living in Sodom (and its neighbor Gemorrah). I want us to look at the way Peter describes Lot in verses 7 – 9 of 2 Peter 2:

***7 and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men 8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)-- 9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.***

I want us to consider four things displayed in the life of Lot:

1. Lot was *righteous*.
2. Lot was *distressed by sin*.
3. Lot was *tormented by sin*.
4. Lot was preserved by the sovereign work of God.

### **Lot was Righteous**

Three times in two verses, Peter calls Lot ‘righteous’. In verse 9 he refers to Lot as ‘godly’. Peter is here pulling this characterization of Lot straight from Moses’ account of the destruction of Sodom and Gemorrah in Genesis 19. We remember that God told Abraham of His plan to destroy city because of its heinous wickedness. At that Abraham interceded for Sodom and Gemorrah, asking that it be spared if fifty righteous were found in the city. Knowing the reputation of these cities, Abraham talked God down sparing the cities for the sake of ten righteous people. But, alas, not even ten could be found. But, God took special care of Abraham’s nephew Lot.

**Consider the truth of this:** Lot was the ONLY righteous man in those cities. Even his wife succumbed to the temptation and promise of a wicked life! Can you imagine being the only person standing for virtue, truth, justice, goodness, and righteousness in the entire twin cities?!

Let’s think about what Peter, and Moses, mean in claiming that Lot was righteous. We know that true righteousness only comes by faith in God, as clearly established in the life of Abraham leading up to Genesis 19. But in affirming righteousness by faith alone we sometimes forget the fuller semantic range of this word in a Semitic context, and in any other context for that matter. The word ‘righteous’ – *tsaddiq* in Hebrew- at its core refers to the righteousness of God reckoned to creatures by faith. But it also carries the meaning of *faithfulness*, or *righteous* behavior. If I may be so bold, I would define the ‘righteousness’ of Lot as: *faith in God and faithfulness in action where it matters most*.

In all cultures there is always an esoteric, pious, and vain ‘righteousness’. I think of the words of Isaiah and Jesus, “these people worship me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (*Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:8*). There is that horrible ‘form of godliness, while denying the power thereof’ (*2 Tim. 3:5*). We need to remember that in Sodom and Gemorrah not everyone was an overtly hostile homosexual fornicator. There were perhaps hundreds of people who claimed to know God, to worship God, to love God.

They just sat idly by as the waves of wickedness and destruction swelled around them. I think in some senses there is nothing so pathetic as a righteous piety that lacks any force in a weekly, daily, moment by moment pursuit of holiness and overt and open righteousness. I think of the double minded, soupy claims of people who are ‘personally against abortion, but are publicly for choice.’ As if somehow this passes for conviction: “I am personally against spousal abuse, but publicly I believe a husband has the right to beat his wife.” Or, “I am personally against the owning of slaves, but am publicly for the

rights of the plantation owner”. What does the Apostle John say? “Dear Children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and truth” (*1 John 3:18*).

### **Lot was Distressed By Sin**

2 Peter 2:7 says that Lot was ‘distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men’. This word distressed can mean that Lot was *burdened*, or he was *heavy* with the sin that surrounded him. We could say that ‘Lot bore the sin of those around him’. I think Peter is talking about a response to the sin around that amounts to much more than just ‘righteous indignation’. We evangelicals are good at that. We understand that. We know how to be indignant, angry, fed up, ticked off for Jesus. I don’t think this is what Peter means.

Lot was grieved to the core about the destructive lives of his countrymen. He was so zealous for the holiness of God that it vexed his spirit to see people wantonly disregard the gift and glory of sexuality, or the gift and sanctity of human life. He was loaded up with the sins around him. He begged for them to turn back, he pled with them to repent. He interceded, along with Abraham, before a just God that they be spared. Is this your life?

Peter also says that Lot was distressed by the ‘*sensual conduct of lawless men*’. Lot was distressed by the vice, the indecency, the dirty and cheap sensuality that is such a mockery of true, lasting intimate sexuality. I think that we are complicit in the culture of death manifested in the widespread crime of abortion in our tacit acceptance of the constant barrage of dirty sensuality and vice that leads to ‘unwanted pregnancies’. By the time we have begun to deal with the murder of our own children, we must ask, ‘How has it come to this?’ We have welcomed it into our homes, we have worn the symbols of vice on our sleeves, breast, and jean pockets. We have consumed it through TV, radio, movies, internet and every other conceivable media. We have celebrated our freedom in all things, and when the price must be paid for our anarchy, we offer up our own children.

### **Lot was Tormented by Sin**

In verse 8 Peter says, “that righteous man, living among them day after day, was *tormented in his righteous soul* by the lawless deeds he saw and heard”. At first glance we might think that Peter is just reinforcing what he said in verse 7 about Lot’s being ‘distressed by sin’. But when we look closely we see that Peter uses a different word than ‘distress’. The NIV translates it adequately as ‘tormented’, the KJV says he was ‘vexed’ in his righteous soul. This word could be translated ‘buffeted’ or beat about. In Matthew 14:24 uses the word to describe a boat rocked around by the waves. Elsewhere the Gospel writers describe the paralytic suffering of the Centurion’s servant as ‘torment’. We discover that Lot was hammered by sin. It was dealing deadly blows to him day by day.

We could say that Lot was taking a beating for his righteousness. When you stand for righteousness in a wicked age, you take a beating. You take a beating in your job. You take a beating in your class. You take a beating from the media. You take a beating in your reputation. How many celebrities do you hear standing for life? How many

politicians stand for the rights of the unborn without equivocation? If you do, you'll take a beating. Are you ready to take a beating? Or are you ready to sell out at the first sight of trauma for standing on your convictions? Praise God for those who have taken a beating so that truth and justice might prevail, even in the darkest corners of society.

I think of William Wilberforce who stood against the African Slave trade in Great Britain for twenty years in Parliament, taking beatings, being tormented, losing fame, losing money, losing reputation. But, in 1807, after 20 tireless years of campaigning for the lives and persons of African slaves, Parliament voted overwhelmingly to ban slavery in England. Are you one who is willing to be righteous in an unrighteous age and suffer the torment of soul that comes with it?

### **Lot was Preserved by the Sovereign Work of God**

Peter says in verse 9, "the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment". I love those three words: *the Lord knows*. God knows your situation. God knows the sin around you. God knows the plight of the unborn. God knows the shameful lies of our culture of death. God knows. But what a terrible phrase for sinners to consider! When I am enjoying my sin, *the Lord knows*. When I am silent in the face of injustice, *the Lord knows*. When I place my comfort over and above the needs of my neighbor, *the Lord knows*. I am altogether unsure how one handles the devastating realities of the sin around us without a firm and steadfast belief in God's sovereign rule over the lives of his creatures. Without a trust in the unchanging, all powerful, all good God of the universe, I would give in to despair.

Yesterday I sat and read Chief Justice Roger Taney's ruling in the now infamous Dred Scot v. Sandford case of 1857. A case which disallowed U.S. citizenship for blacks. A case which by judicial fiat removed the personhood of a class of humans in our country. A case which opened the way for the slave trade in the new U.S. territories. Could this have been the same country? The words seemed so crassly ignorant, so archaic, so shameful.

It is my prayer before a sovereign God 'who knows how to rescue the godly' that one day we will read Justice Blackmun's opinion in Roe v. Wade with similar disdain. One day our nation will recall with shame the decades of death wrought by this decision in 1973. I'll be honest with you, this seems impossible. From my own limited perspective, I am prone to despair. Then I remember that God is sovereign. God knows how to handle this. He is not deaf to our cries for help. He is not deaf to the cries of over 40 million little ones. Let's continue to plead their case before our sovereign God.