

“Bring the Little Children to Me: A Plea for Life” // Luke 18:15–17 // *In Step* #11

[Bumper video: Adoption story]: **If you’ve truly experienced the gospel** then you can’t help but *live out* the gospel--and there are few better and more beautiful pictures of the gospel than adoption. I’m so grateful for Cheryl and the plethora of other Summit families who have stepped forward to love our community in Jesus’ name to serve in this most incredible of ways. . I don’t know the exact number--the last time I checked there were around 300 families involved with adoption or foster care. Stand up.

Hey one quick thing before we get started I want to remind you of, and that is our **Regional Prayer Gatherings happening next Saturday, Jan. 30 at 4pm all of our permanent locations** (CPC, BCC, Blue Ridge, Apex, SEE). This is the culmination of 21 days of prayer and fasting, and whether you participated in that or not I want you to be there. We want to start out 2021 calling out on God together--pleading for his guidance and his touch on our lives, our families, our church and our community this year. So, I’m asking you--*imploring you*, cajoling you, whatever I am allowed to do up here--to make this a priority for you and your family next weekend. **All details and RSVP** info is at summitchurch.com. And for our online-only friends, we’ll also be live streaming it, and there will be information about that there, too. Okay?

OK: Open your Bible to Luke 18. We continue on in our series, *In Step*, through the Gospel of Luke. In Step with Jesus, even if out of step with the world.

Luke 18. Last year leading up to the election I preached a message from **Luke 10** on the Good Samaritan in which Jesus explained that it is the duty of all Christians to care about any injustice around them, whether it affects us directly or not. Jesus **told a story about a Jewish man** who had been beaten up and left bleeding on the side of the road, and two Jewish religious leaders walked right past him--good and respectable men, no doubt, but THEY didn’t know the bleeding man and THEY hadn’t been the ones who beat him up, so they didn’t feel obligated to help him. **Through this story, Jesus taught** that taking care of the vulnerable and the hurting around us is our responsibility--whether or not we had anything to do with his situation. **Injustice in the eyes of God, you see, is not just cheating someone.** This is new for some of you--but Injustice in God’s eyes, in both the Old and New Testaments, is seeing someone in need and being in a position to help and failing to do that.

For Luke, the obligation of the strong to protect the weak is a defining feature of following Jesus. If your life is not defined by caring for the vulnerable, you can no more say you are a follower of Jesus than you could if you were openly sleeping around or refusing to read your Bible.

Works consulted:

“Abortion and the Narrow Way,” John Piper

“Abortion Prayer Guide,” Scott Klusendorf and John Stonestreet

“Abortion and Miscarriage,” Al Mohler

“Abortion (from Secret Church),” David Platt

Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Luke, commentary, Thabiti M. Anyabwile

That's the backdrop for what happens in **Luke 18:15** People were bringing infants to him so that he might touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. 16 Jesus, however, invited them: "Let the little children come to me, and don't stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 17 Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

The disciples, like many in Jewish culture, did not value children. Their needs were just not as important as the needs of adults. Adults needed Jesus, so the needs of the kids should be put to the side. But Jesus says that children were his first priority. As a matter of fact, children, he says, are the ones in the best posture to receive Jesus' kingdom, and unless we grasp that we are all like them--vulnerable and helpless, spiritually speaking--we'll never truly reach out for the Kingdom of God. And when we do grasp that--that we are all vulnerable and helpless like children before God--from that point on we'll have a special place in our hearts for the vulnerable and the helpless around us.

There are lots of places where we could apply this, but I want to focus today on the place Jesus did-- children; particularly children in their most vulnerable state right now: **in the womb. This past Friday marked 48 years since the Supreme Court declared abortion to be a fundamental right.**

Now, before you tense up, let me just acknowledge: I'm always a little bit conflicted on this--I don't want to come off like a partisan culture warrior. But here's the thing: **this should not be a political issue.** Regardless of your approach to other political questions, Christians should be absolutely united on this. And it's been a long time since I've really dived in like this--this is pretty unusual. But I know that if I never talk about some of these hard things, I'm failing at my job.

And let me just say: if you have had an abortion or you are considering it, please don't hear me standing up here pointing a finger of judgment at you regarding one of the most painful chapters of your life. I know that some of you *felt like* you didn't have a choice. **Sixty-four percent** of women who get abortions said that they felt strong pressure from others to do so). Jesus primary **purpose in coming to earth, you see, was not stopping abortions; it was to die for abortion-committing sinners.** And that means the heartbeat of our message here is not the legislation of a culture of life; it's the offer of new life in Jesus.¹ Let me be very clear: If you've had an abortion: **The Lord Jesus stands before you this weekend** not with a finger pointed in condemnation but with arms opened wide in mercy.

Now, one final elephant in the room: **Some of you may think that I, as a man, and a white man to boot, have no right to talk about this. You say, "No womb, no say!"**

- **But I would just ask you, gently, to consider:** Since when is speaking out for justice something only a few of us can do? Is **speaking up for the vulnerable something only the vulnerable** can do? Is speaking up against the unjust treatment of minorities something only minorities should do? The Good Samaritan had an obligation to speak up for the man on the side of the road even if he'd never been beaten up himself. I'm going to present reason and Scripture to you today and I want you to evaluate those things on the

¹ John Piper, "Abortion and the Narrow Way that Leads to Life," (Matthew 7:7-14).

basis of their merit, not my gender.² Truth doesn't have a gender or a race. Truth is truth regardless of whose mouth it is in.

- **What is happening today—and what should be happening every week—is NOT that you're listening to the opinions of a white man.** We gather to listen to what God has to say about things. If I say anything today that contradicts what's in this Book, please, ignore it. But if I say anything that is found in this Book, I urge you, cling to it, because these are not idle words, they are our life.³

So, to begin: if we're going to look at the world with the eyes of the Good Samaritan, we should first be honest about the state of the victim in front of us.

Listen to this:

- “In 2018 abortion was the leading cause of death worldwide, with 42 million victims. That is roughly seven holocausts in a single year.”⁴
- Last year right at 900,000 babies were electively aborted, which is more than the total amount of American casualties in the 2 World Wars and the Vietnam War combined. Every year.
- In Iceland, which many consider a progressive utopia, “the abortion rate for children diagnosed with Down syndrome now approaches 100 percent.” In the United States, 90 percent of preborn humans diagnosed with Down Syndrome are terminated.⁵
- *“In Asia, widespread sex selective abortions have led to 160 million missing women today--which is more than the entire female population of the United States right now. Recent studies suggest that selective abortions of baby girls are common in the United States also.”* In NYC, each year more black children are aborted than are born.⁶

I agree with **Pastor Thabiti Anyabwile** who says, **“It's staggeringly clear that the largest scale injustice--the most morally outrageous thing happening in our society today--is the killing of children in the womb..”**⁷

Listen: Are you committed to social justice? Do you want to defend the vulnerable? Do you want to fight systemic injustice? There are few places where dire urgency meets such moral clarity and clear opportunity as with the cause of the protection of children in the womb.

Now, I know a lot of people will say, **“Well, it's a lot more complex than that.** The baby is a part of a woman's body, and we need to respect her right to privacy and sovereignty over her body.” And I agree that the right to privacy over our bodies is precious.

² I love how Thaddeus Williams says this: “We don't evaluate arguments by the nature of the private parts of those who make them. Arguments don't have private parts, people do.”

³ Plus, if you want to get technical about it, the ruling of Roe vs. Wade in 1973 that legalized abortion was handed down by 7 white men. Why must we automatically accept what they decided as truth?

⁴ Thaddeus Williams, Loc 3730.

⁵ Caroline Mansfield, “Termination Rates After Prenatal Diagnosis Of Down Syndrome, Spina Bifida... *Prenatal Diagnosis* 19:9 (1999): 808-12

⁶ Clarence Thomas, “Box vs. Planned Parenthood of Indiana and Kentucky,” citing Mara Hvistendahl, “Unnatural Selection: Choosing Boys Over Girls, and the Consequences of a World Full of Men.”

⁷ Thabiti Anyabwile, “Speak Up for the Vulnerable,” preached at SEBTS on January 25, 2019.

But here's the thing: The baby is not part of her body. That baby is intimately attached to her body for a period of time, yes, but it's not part of her body. Listen, Thaddeus Williams, from whom I glean a lot of this today, says: "From the moment of conception, that baby has its own DNA--it's own unique genetic code, a unique heart, (unique) circulatory system, brain, and more. If you're saying it is a part of her body, does that mean SHE herself has 2 brains, 2 hearts, and 4 arms and legs?"⁸ No, it's a separate person, even intimately attached to her body.

Scripture certainly presents the preborn child as its own person: The Psalmist of Psalm 139 says that in the womb God knew me by name, as a person; there I was fearfully and wonderfully made, knit together according to the plan of God with his purpose for me already in mind.

- **Scripture tells us** that John the Baptist leapt in Elizabeth's womb because his spirit--in the womb--was filled with the Spirit when he came into the presence of Jesus.

Someone says, "But it's still IN my body." Yes, but we all know our rights over our bodies are not absolute as far as the law is concerned. Prostitution is illegal in most states, and I don't know of anywhere in the US can you legally pour drugs into your body just because it's your body.⁹ **Your rights to your body stop precisely at that place where they begin to affect someone else's.** And that's exactly what is happening to the pre-born.

People say, "Well, saying life begins at conception is a matter of opinion, and you shouldn't force your opinion on others." But we're not in the realm of opinion, here; we're in the realm of biology and Scripture. Hear me out--let me get in the weeds for about 5 minutes. Hang with me.

- If you say "life begins at birth": Well, the only difference in a baby 5 seconds prior to birth and 5 seconds after birth is location, and "location" seems like an arbitrary foundation for personhood.¹⁰ Scientifically, what is the difference in the nature of the baby 5 seconds before birth and 5 seconds after?
- If you say, "Life begins with brain function, when the baby can experience pain, when they are in (what scientists call) a sentient (or self-conscious) state." Well, first, note that that contradicts the position that abortion is a fundamental woman's right through all nine months of pregnancy simply because it is in her womb. But second, does that mean when we are not in a 'sentient' state we have lost our right to life? If I go into a temporary coma from which you know I am going to wake up in 9 mos., my strong preference would be that you not kill me.
- If you say, "Life begins at viability," (when the baby can live on its own). This also seems like a strange criteria for when personhood begins, because isn't viability contingent on the advancement of technology? Every year, doesn't newer, better technology push the length of "viability" back? If "viability" determines personhood, that means whether or not someone is a person is dependent on how advanced our technology is. And that seems arbitrary--it means that those born in more technologically advanced societies somehow possess greater personhood and more rights than those who are born in poor countries--and that doesn't make sense.

⁸ Ibid., 174.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Thaddeus Williams, p. 176.

- Plus, I would argue that **the more helpless a person is, the more vulnerable--the less viable--the more we as a society should do to protect them.** In the words of Cardinal Roger Mahony says, **"We judge societies on how they treat their weakest members—the last, the least, and the littlest."**

Even if you are unclear on this, and are not convinced that personhood begins at conception--shouldn't you err on the side of life? *"If you're hunting in the woods and hear a rustling in the bushes and you're uncertain as to whether it's your friend or a deer, morality and common sense dictate that you don't pull the trigger, given the potential risk of murder."*¹¹

You say, "Well, if abortion were made illegal, people would just go back to coat hangers and back alley butchers." Two things I'd say here:

- First, just to be clear, stories of that are WAY exaggerated. A total of 39 women died the year before Roe vs. Wade through illegal abortions. And that's tragic, of course, but compare that to 900,000 babies who died in state-sanctioned abortions this year.
- Second, again quoting Thaddeus Williams: the "coat hanger" argument misses the point that the preborn are people, and pointing out some negative side effects of a restriction doesn't justify the sanctioning of murder.¹²

People say, "What about in the case of genetic disabilities? We shouldn't bring babies into the world with genetic disabilities whose lives will be reduced to hardship and unhappiness."

- First, note that people with disabilities are vehemently opposed to this argument. There is not a single organization of disabled people in the world that I know of that is in favor of elective abortions of those who have disabilities.¹³
- **Second, you are making a false correlation between genetic deformities and unhappiness.** Listen to this: "No study... has found that handicapped persons are more likely than non-handicapped persons to want to die or commit suicide... This report, which came out in Baltimore, said: "In fact, of the 200 consecutive suicides in Baltimore last year... none had been committed by people with congenital deformities."¹⁴ None! If you're trying to say that we should be able to abort those whom we know in advance are the most likely to be unhappy, it's not those with genetic deformities that you should start with. They are on the happy end of the scale.
- **The point is: Who are we to determine when another life is not worth living?**
- Again: this whole line of thinking misses the point: The preborn baby is a person. And if we think they might experience hardship in their lives, does that justify killing them in advance?
 - And I'd love to introduce you to two church members: **Anna Williamson** and **Daniel Ritchie**.
Twitter/Insta: Two people who are the most full of life people I know...

¹¹ Thaddeus Williams, p. 177.

¹² Ibid., 176

¹³ Ibid., 170.

¹⁴ Quoted in Ibid.

I've heard people say, **"Abortion sometimes help poor women escape crushing financial burdens. Banning abortion would cause overpopulation and massive poverty."**

- **This kind of statement confuses "finding a solution" with "eliminating a problem."** Think of it this way: If the neighbor's dog keeps pooping in your yard... you go out and shoot the dog. You've eliminated a problem, but you haven't come up with a solution.
- **If poverty is a problem, let's keep working to find a solution.**
- **Again, the point is--the preborn are people. You can't justify killing a person because it eliminates a problem.** I mean, if you use that reasoning there, where does it stop? Couldn't you use that same line of reasoning to justify eliminating other financially burdensome groups?

People then say, "Well, what about in cases of rape or incest?"

- **First, let me say I can't imagine the pain involved in something like this.** It's unspeakable. But just to keep it in perspective. These tragic and heartbreaking cases make up less than 1% of all abortions. When someone says this to me, I always ask them: "So are you agreeing then that the other 99% of abortions are indeed immoral?"
- **But the bigger point is this:** Does the fact that that baby got there by rape or incest change the fact that they are still A PERSON? Does the circumstances of one's birth take away from their personhood? If a grown adult found out that they were conceived by rape, would that somehow reduce their value, or right to life, as a person?
- **Keep your eye on the central question:** Is the preborn baby a person?¹⁵ If they are, how they became a person is irrelevant.

Listen: That little human life, that little person, regardless of how they got there, when it's no bigger than a speck, the size of a period at the end of the sentence, is made in the image of God. That speck has more value than all the planets and stars in the vast cosmos! It has a soul made in the image of God, that Jesus died, that has an eternal future.

I'm getting into the weeds here a little bit because I want you to see that scientifically and Scripturally there is no question about how Jesus feels about THESE little children. "Let them come to me," he says. Their lives are precious and valuable. **And if you care about me,** you'll care about them, and not dismiss them (like the disciples did in this story) as an inconvenience.``

Now, I know some of you may be sitting there and saying, "OK, this sounds like a pretty eloquent defense of life. But **what's MY responsibility?"** And that's a great question. The point of the Good Samaritan story is not we merely THINK the right things, but THAT WE DO the right thing as well. And all of us--ALL OF US--have a role in that.

So, I want you to keep your finger in Luke 18 but flip over to Proverbs 31: This is a passage that Jesus would have been VERY familiar with and that would have profoundly shaped Jesus' own attitude toward justice.

¹⁵ Scott Rae, *Moral Choices*, 136.

Every Jewish boy was reared on the Proverbs, and this section was one of the most well-known, and you can hear it's echoes in the story of the Good Samaritan.

The African American pastor Thabiti Anyabwile says that this passage is crucial in instructing us how to respond to the abortion crisis because it tells us what God's requirement is, the scope of that requirement, and even how we learn that requirement.

From this I want to give some concluding words on this for followers of Jesus and also a **word to those of you who may be sitting there filled with regret** or fear or shame, wondering what you should do.

Prov 31: 1 "The words of King Lemuel, a pronouncement that his mother taught him... Speak up for those who have no voice, for the justice of all who are dispossessed. 9 Speak up, judge righteously, and defend the cause of the oppressed and needy."

First, WHAT is our responsibility? Vs. **8** "Speak up for those who have no voice..."

What better description of the unborn could there be than "those who have no voice"? No one hears their screams as they're slain in the womb--We know they feel pain. Through microscopic cameras we see them flinch as they are injected with poison; we see their heartbeats SPIKE as they're killed. But we don't hear their voices. Some of them are old enough that if they were just 6 inches further out of the womb we could hear their screams. But because they're left in the womb when their life is taken we don't hear them.

So, we are obligated to speak for them. "Speak up" is repeated twice. Once in vs. 8; once in vs. 9. Speak up, the King says. Speak up. Say something. As with the story of the Good Samaritan, not speaking up in the face of injustice makes you guilty of injustice.

It's like **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, said in regards to racial injustice: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter..." Silence IS support. Speak up. ((Everywhere in the world our flag flies right now it represents this. And that is tragic.))

And hey, I want to stop here and say something: I want to ask you to seriously consider whether or not God might be leading some of you to take on the mantle of government leadership for causes like these. We need godly people (in both political parties) advocating for this. As I said, this should not be a partisan issue--much like care for the refugee or respect for the immigrant should not be partisan issues. I don't care what your political party is--all Christians should be united in seeing the removal of this scourge from our land.

Second, Proverbs 31 shows us the SCOPE of that responsibility: **8** ...Speak up for the justice of ALL who are dispossessed. All.

If your love for the vulnerable is sincere, this won't be the only life issue you care about. For some people, pro-life is like a moral club they use in the culture war, even as they ignore the suffering and needs of other

vulnerable groups around them. **If you really care about the vulnerable we'll see you advocating for life everywhere-- the poor, the marginalized, the forgotten of all ages and all races.** Maybe most of all you'll be brokenhearted about those around the world with no access to the gospel. **The greatest tragedy in our world is people dying with the gospel; and the greatest injustice in the world is the failure of the church to get it to them.**

It's like I said: A real commitment to life is demonstrated by advocacy for the vulnerable from the womb to the tomb. But don't tell me you're pro-life if you're apathetic about life in the womb.

And BTW, just so you know, Christians have always been like this. Sometimes I hear people say, *"All you Christians care about it is the preborn!"* But that's not true. Since 1973, for every 1 abortion clinic in America Christians have built 3 pregnancy centers to assist women in crisis. They are buying groceries and helping young mothers get housing and whatever else they need. Go into foster services and adoption agencies and there you will find the group represented most are pro-life Christians and their friends. Christians have built more hospitals around the world than any other single group--for a long time in sub-Saharan Africa there was not a single hospital that hadn't been built by a Christian mission. **So don't believe the tired trope that followers of Jesus only care about the preborn.** It's just not true, and a lot of people use that to excuse the fact that they are virtually silent about the tragedy of abortion. **It's hard to say that you're pro-life from the womb to the tomb if you're apathetic when the womb is a tomb.**

And, do note: **A lot of our ministry to our community here centers around this issue.** Go to our website, summitchurch.com, this weekend, you'll find [more than 10 ways](#) we are already involved deeply in this at this church, ways in which YOU can get involved today.

Third, HOW do we learn that responsibility? Vs. 1 *"The words of King Lemuel, a pronouncement that his mother taught him..."*

Wow, I love this. A commitment to preserve life and a commitment to protect the vulnerable is learned in the home. King Lemuel developed this passion from his momma.¹⁶

Moms, your children should hear you talk about our responsibility to speak up for the vulnerable. They don't learn that from hearing you yell at the news pundit on the TV screen; they learn it from how you coach that older sibling to care for their weaker and more vulnerable younger sibling. When that bigger sister sees her younger sister going for that one toy and she decides that because she's bigger she can just take it from her, that's the place where you teach her about the sin in her heart and how Jesus wants her to be a young lady who looks out for the younger and the weaker. Or dads, when your son comes home talking about how the unpopular kid was being picked on, and you teach him that it's his responsibility to stand up for the weak--

¹⁶ Eleanor Roosevelt, who was a big champion of human rights in the previous century, said, "Where do universal human rights begin? In small places... the home. That's where people learn that every man, woman, and child deserves equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere."

even if it costs him, and even if he gets a bloody nose in the process. You can't just walk on by. **A culture of life is not fomented in the news media, it's grown in the home.**

Finally, this weekend, I want to give a word to those of you who have sat there through this whole service with a pit in your stomach filled by regret, or guilt, or shame, and fear.

- **As I told you at the beginning, the center of Christianity is not a political condemnation of abortion.** The center of Christianity--it's heart--is Jesus Christ dying and rising from the dead to save abortion-committing sinners.
- **In 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul describes the makeup of the early church.** He lists out several categories of sinful people: thieves, extortionists, abusers, rebellious, the apathetic, the greedy, drunkards and drug addicts, slanderers, murderers. You could certainly add abortion--those who carry them out, those who get them, those who encourage them--to that list. Paul ends the list with this phrase: **"And such were some of you... Were. Such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified..."** by the blood of Jesus and the Spirit of God.
- **Listen to me: Your abortion doesn't define you.** Thank God that in Christ none of our sins define us anymore. You are a beloved daughter or son of God whose sin Jesus went to a cross to pay for. He has put your sin into the depths of the deepest part of the sea and put up a sign that says "no fishing allowed." *"What sin?"* he says. *"Though your sins be as scarlet, I have made them white as snow. Behold, I make all things new."* This is the new reality he wants you to live in. You can't change the past, but you can become a protector and preserver of life now. **One of our teaching pastor's wives had an abortion--she told her story here last year. God not only forgave her, he set her on a whole new path, one that involves being a loving mother to her kids and a blessing to others, including my own. He's got a plan for you, too. Because of the cross, your sin is not the last word about you.** Because of the resurrection, your mistakes aren't either. "If any man (or woman) be in Christ..."

Hey listen, maybe you're 16, and you just found out you're pregnant. I know you're terrified. And maybe the dad is already long gone, and you're scared. I want you to look around this church. We're here. Look around. There's 500 men here ready to be a part of this boy's life. We're ready to help you raise him. And there's 500 ladies here who are going to step up and help you mother her. They're going to mother you as you mother that baby. They're going to shower you with so many gifts it's going to be awkward. I've seen it happen. We've got you financially, we've got you emotionally. We've got you practically. We've got you, girl.

And when that kid turns 18 and walks across that stage to graduate, there's going to be a bunch of us there cheering for him and calling his name and saying "hoot, hoot, hoot" and the Principal is going to have to call us down and tell us we need to show some respect for others but we're not going to care. And if you can't handle any of it, we'll find a family in this church to adopt him.

We're not going to leave you. That man may have run away but we're not, because we serve a God who didn't run away from us. So, don't be afraid. Have that baby. Have that baby. By God's grace you can do this. His grace is enough, his grace is enough. Don't be afraid.¹⁷

If you're a dad involved in this, tell her you'll support her. Be a man. Don't shirk your responsibility to protect the vulnerable in your life. Again, 64% of women who get abortions say they did so because they felt pressured. Don't be in that 64%. Have the courage to do it God's way. Maybe that feels overwhelming to you. We're here to help you, too.

A few years ago I preached on this, and I said similar things to what I said today. Unbeknownst to me, in our congregation that day sat a college-aged girl who had just learned she was pregnant and who was scheduled that afternoon to go in and have an abortion. She said that my words that morning and the spirit of grace in our church convinced her to cancel the appointment, choose life for her baby, and put the baby up for adoption.

The first I knew of this was a year later, when into my office walked the family who adopted this baby to show me how God had used his Word through us to save their new daughter's life. (PICTURE)

I get a lot of hate mail when I talk about this. But that one picture makes all those hate letters evaporate into the wind. So speak up, Summit. Speak up for those who have no voice. Defend the cause of the needy and all the oppressed. These are not games we are playing. People's lives depend on our voice and our action. Let us say to our community like Jesus did, "Bring the little children to us! We want them. We'll take them all." Choose Christ. Choose the way of Christ. Choose life.

PRAYER

Invite to come up at end of service

¹⁷ I owe the inspiration for this pastoral invitation to Thabiti Anyabwile, "Speak Up for the Vulnerable," preached at SEBTS on January 25, 2019.

