

Confronting a Disregard for Life

Series: Joining God for the City

Brad Bailey – March 22, 2015

Intro

150 years ago this month...in March of 1865... there came a unique moment in for our nation. It was the Second Inaugural of President Abraham Lincoln. [1]

4 years earlier... upon his first election and inaugural, the nation was headed into a civil war. Now four years later, no one could have imagined the tragedy that would have unfolded. Between 650,000 and 750,000 lives had dies... in proportion to today's population... it would be 6 million lives. Not just dead...but dead by the hand of their own countrymen.

At this point it was clear that the Union... the north... would prevail. Lincoln has already delivered the Emancipation Proclamation... declaring freedom to all American slaves...and the end was appearing inevitable...though still brutal.

Lincoln could rise this day...finally with an air of confidence that he had been right in his direction...he could claim triumph.

What he bore held none of that. He rose spoke that which was profound in it's brevity...just 700 words...and even more profound in it's humility.

The nation must face it's spiritual failure...for the violence of these years was upon them all.

Historian Don E. Fehrenbacher wrote: "In the Second Inaugural, [Lincoln] "revealed his most deeply held convictions to a national audience in a way that no other president has done throughout all of American history." (Historian Don E. Fehrenbacher)

"It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. 'Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!'

If we shall suppose that American Slavery ... He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away."

Historian Ronald White said, "In this final paragraph, Lincoln offered the ultimate surprise. Instead of rallying his supporters, in the name of God, to support the war, he asked his listeners, quietly, to imitate the ways of God." (Ronald C. White, Jr., Lincoln's Greatest Speech: The Second Inaugural)

"With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan – to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations."

Those there recall a **soberness rarely felt**... There were cheers and tears at the conclusion...after which...when silence was restored...the Chief Justice was called forward with a Bible. Lincoln, laying his right hand upon the open page, repeated the oath of office administered to him by the Chief Justice, after which, solemnly saying, "*So help me God,*" he **bent forward and reverently kissed the Book**, then rose up inaugurated President of the United States.

Forty-one days later he was dead...assassinated. But he had **set into motion** that which met the moment... humility.

As he said memorably in his second inaugural address, "*The Almighty has His own purposes,*" and Lincoln believed one can have conviction but should be careful not to be too quick to presume God is on their side.

During the Civil War, **a minister told Lincoln that he hoped "the Lord is on our side."** The president responded that **he constantly prayed "that I and this nation should be on the Lord's side."**

Even when he gave his second inaugural address, when the Civil War was almost over, Lincoln **cautioned his Northern listeners against taking a morally superior attitude** toward the nearly defeated South. He said, "It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged."

At the bedrock is Lincoln's humility.

He included himself as one who "looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding."

In those words he is facing the reality of violence... it is the easier triumph... never reflecting what is most fundamental and astounding.

I've been struck by the depth of humility...a humility that he said... was his own.

The treatment of those who had been enslaved...whom he now realizes...are fully equals is overwhelming....but now the war that ensued... the loss of lives... caused him to look within...and to face God.

As we continue our focus this season on joining God for the city... looking at the city not simply as a place...or a problem...but as that which bears the purposes and potential of God... we must look consider what it means to be redemptive participants... and that involves confronting the destructive elements within us. And that includes violence...and all forms of violating the sacred nature of fellow human lives.

I know that **none of faces the role of the president amidst the violence of the Civil War**...but there is a **violence that runs through our culture**... through **our cities**...and through our **own hearts**.

Throughout human history, **cities have held the power of safety from the open**...they have been the place that one might **seek more order and justice**...the place that **new immigrants** who might

be rejected as outsiders among more homogenous communities **might find acceptance**. But they can also be the place that the human heart competes...in which the industrial revolutions reduce people to that of production machines.

It's in cities that humanity is often lost... exploited in a thousand ways.

Our nation has the highest rate of incarceration

The cost of violent crime has been estimated to be \$42 billion per year. [2]

So lets hear again the great value of life...

We're told in

Genesis 1:27-28

"So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Sanctity lies in the **distinction**. The sacred quality of human life does not simply imply that human life is better or superior...but human life is endowed with God's image...a nature that can uniquely reflect.

All life bears God's intent...but humans bear God's image.

1. Every human life bears the image of God...however denied or distorted...it is rooted in God-given worth

The Bible affirms that there is an "irreducible glory and significance" inherent in each person, regardless of who they are or what they have done.

C.S. Lewis, stated so pointedly [3],

"There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.

Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat.

But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit.

[Therefore], our merriment [and play] must be of the kind which exists between people who have from the outset taken each other seriously."

Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses."

Civil rights—the idea that every human being is entitled to certain liberties regardless of race, gender, or class—is grounded in the Biblical principle that all people have intrinsic value and dignity.

Of course the story of our human roots continues...

An enemy enters the garden... described as a snake and suggests they should be like God... be their own rulers.

Scriptures shows when human life sought to become like God... on our own...we didn't just lose our relationship with God...but with ourselves.

But it's not over...God sets the snake in it's place and states one will rise up to defeat it.

> That snake like entity has been at work ever since...and God has provided.

One son, Cain, rises up and kills the other, Abel, in an act of insecurity... and jealousy...the very root of life disconnected from it's source...

See how God confronts that life...

Genesis 4:9-13 (NIV)

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. ¹¹ Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹² When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth." ¹³ Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear.

When Cain murders Abel, God questions him saying "Where is Abel your brother?" and "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground." God is not seeking information, but rather creating an opportunity for Cain to repent of his sin. Why is this so?

Sin results when one is self-focused, rather than God- focused. Repentance, however, goes to the root of this problem by turning one's attention to God and others once again. It is the action of removing oneself from the center that heals the hardness and pride of the heart.

However, **Cain does not repent**. Instead, **he complains to God** that his "punishment is more than he can bear." In other words, **he is sorry for the consequences** of his sin, **not the sin** itself. **This leads to his exile from the presence of God, which is the ultimate downfall of Cain.**

From **the line of Cain what flows carries this violence...this disregard for the value of human life.**

We are told that Cain began to build a city...a city marked by it's abilities to create – describing technology, and music. However, rather than a Garden of Eden through love and service, it becomes a place marked by oppression and violence. For example, one descendant of Cain called Lamech boasts saying,

Genesis 4:23-24 (NIV)

Lamech said ... "hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times."

Their culture is now about power and exploitation.

In such boasting... we can see... that violence does not begin with standing armies, generational ethnic hatred, or longstanding social inequities. Violence begins with pride... the deepest pathology of the soul.

But God was not finished...even with Cain. When God judged Cain for the murder of Abel he became fearful for his life. The Bible speaks of God putting a mark on Cain to protect him from others.

Genesis 4:15 (CEV)

The LORD answered. "Anyone who kills you will be punished seven times worse than I am punishing you." So the LORD put a mark on Cain to warn everyone not to kill him.

God's mark of protection on Cain was to help provide for his safety. It didn't necessarily prevent Cain from being attacked or murdered. The mark merely warned that anyone who killed Cain would himself suffer a worse death.

The text does not tell us what the mark was. The phrase "put a mark on Cain" does not necessarily mean that there was some mark upon his person. The phrase **could mean a sign for him**. This could mean that God gave some sign to appear for Cain's reassurance. Thus the idea of mark may mean some type of token or pledge.

> *God is protecting man from man. [4]*

2. God seeks to protect life from human vanity and vengeance

We see this further as God calls the people to create **cities of refuge** when they enter the Promised Land and begin to form life together.

The Cities of Refuge were towns in the Kingdom of Israel and Kingdom of Judah in which the perpetrators of manslaughter could claim the right of asylum; outside of these cities, blood vengeance against such perpetrators. [5]

When God established the Cities of Refuge He had more in mind than just providing a place for people who killed someone by accident to go for protection. I believe God's intent was to affirm life, establish justice, to point to the true place of refuge at the foot of the cross of Jesus, and to give the church a vivid picture of what He wanted us to be.

We here this warning to Noah...

Genesis 9: 6 (NIV) in which God, speaking to Noah and his family, states, "I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being... for in the image of God has God made mankind."

Notice that our highest accountability is to God...

Life is not from us. Its from God. So if we violate life....we are first and foremost violating God who created life. To violate it...is to violate God....

Some may recall King David...the great King of Israel. A man after God's heart... brace military leader...but not without his weaknesses....and one night he takes a married woman to himself...and then has her husband killed on the frontlines of war. As he pours out his prayer...he writes in Psalm 51. "Against You and You only have I sinned"?

And you want to say, "Wait a second! David! You've sinned pretty good against Uriah, there! You killed him. You murdered him." But David know that while we are fully accountable to others, our highest accountability is to God...

We may think...this whole concern for violence... **haven't killed anyone.**

But Jesus said,

Matthew 5:21-22 (NLT)

“You have heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’²² 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.

3. God calls us out from the “violence” of our hearts which disregards human life.

Jesus uncovers the false righteousness that we are all clothed in.

Jesus connects anger and what flows from it....because just like Cain... our **anger is the danger.**

Not simply healthy anger....but contempt...that which seeks the hurt or harm of another.

Does that sound a little closer to home... ?

We focus on physical harm....but Jesus is calling us out from the whole posture that disregards others...devalues and demeans.

If someone **explodes in rage** and begins to scream obscenities at another...we can **feel the violence. Might I add...that there can be violence in silence as well...if it is intended to violate one’s regard...to reject and refuse another. It can be a way of cursing another.**

And often the **sarcasm that comes with a grin**...reveals a wicked grin...because it seeks to destroy another person.

We can disregard the sacred nature of life...**in countless ways.**

I would venture to say that **everything that glorifies violence**... not shows violence...but glorifies it.

Every form of lobbing insults across the various forms of media...TV... text messages.. posting online

- 90% of middle school students polled had their feelings hurt online
- 65% of students between 8-14 have been involved directly or indirectly in a cyber bullying incident as the cyber bully, victim or friend. [6]

Every label that casts one group as somehow fundamentally other. We may do well to recognize that when we speak about those who may not have a home...that “homeless” is not a category of people...it is a context by which one is living.

Every group that has become a “them” to us the “we”...can reflect that which disregards the true sacred worth of others.

To these violations of human worth...God calls us to destroy discrimination ...and to become those who help seek the “common good”...to become peacemakers.

Finally...

4. God has taken the violence of the world upon Himself... and provides a way for life.

Jesus was not merely brutally crucified ...he came to die for us.
He took the violence and bore...and defeated it's ultimate power.
In doing so, **he becomes our city of refuge.**

- The cities of refuge were appointed by God Himself. In the same way, God is the One who has provided his son...the way of refuge and forgiveness.
- The cities were accessible to all (even non-Jews). These cities of refuge were set up so that no matter where you were in Israel you would be within 30 miles of one of these cities. In much the same way, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is available to everyone. He is not far from you (even if you feel far from Him). **Christ is now the city of refuge for all who will come.**
- It was a crisis that drove the people to one of these cities. Likewise it often takes some kind of crisis to get a person to look beyond their own ability and put their hope and faith in Christ.

It is significant that the slayer is not finally released from this city until the **death of the high priest**. At his death, he could leave the city. So, even in the case of accidental killing, only death could deal with death. The high priest here stands in effect as a substitute for the killer. Only death can take care of death! **He became the priests whose death set free those in the cities of refuge.**

Let me close with these two simple affirmation for us to focus on.

You have worth you have not even begun to grasp.

> Your worth will never be greater. You are already fully endowed as one who bears the image of God. You can dismiss it...distort it... reject it...but you cannot change it.
It's my belief that we have all sold ourselves to many means of conditional worth... that we will have worth IF we are beautiful enough... successful enough.

Those around us have worth... we haven't begun to grasp.

Let's invite God gives us eyes to see the worth in those around us...perhaps there are family you have sort of written up or written off...perhaps someone you consider a lost cause...or a "nobody."

Let's pray.

Resources: The Sanctity of human life. A perspective from New Testament anthropology
H C. van Zyl (South Africa), Timothy Keller – "A Tale of Two Cities" and "In the Image of God,";
Andy Rau – "What Does the Bible Say About Violence?"

Notes:

1. The full text of the Second Inaugural Address bears further sharpness in navigating such a moral and spiritual crossroads. In similar fashion, two years earlier, he presents a Proclamation Appointing a National Fast Day

March 1863, Washington, D.C.

President Abraham Lincoln - A day for National Prayer and Humiliation

And whereas it is the duty of nations as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions, in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon...

And, insomuch as we know that, by His divine law, nations like individuals are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world, may we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war, which now desolates the land, may be but a punishment, inflicted upon us, for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole People?

2. Violence truly is violating the lives of America and elsewhere. Here in the US, "Reducing current rates of murder, rape, assault, and robbery would produce a wide range of savings and other benefits for Americans as individuals, property owners, and taxpayers. In 2010 these four main types of violent crime cost Americans more than \$42 billion in direct costs, including the associated costs of police, courts and correctional institutions, out-of-pocket-medical expenses borne by victims, and lost earnings by both victims and perpetrators who are arrested and convicted." The Economic Benefits of Reducing Violent Crime – June 2012 study https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/06/pdf/violent_crime.pdf

3. *The Weight of Glory* (HarperOne, 2001), pp. 45-46.

One question that immediately comes up is whether the Bible itself promotes violence. Isn't the Old Testament a very bloody account of history, and doesn't God himself condone violence? This is a large and important question. I would highly recommend Paul Copan's book, *Is God a Moral Monster?*

4. God allowed life to be taken when such a life was taking or threatening the ongoing life of others.

The instances in which we read through the ancient times where God sanctioned laws of eye for an eye...or even the killing of those committing certain crimes against humanity... or even the complete desolation of those who sought to destroy Israel. These can be really challenging elements to understand, In brevity, I would just note....

It is always the ultimate protection of human existence that God is protecting.

We all have some sense that there is something tragic whenever a life is lost...but something more clearly wrong when the ending of that life is not serving any greater good towards life.

Lives lost to war... or to stop a crime of greater loss...are tragic...but the taking of a life because one wants the shoes another is wearing... or because it makes one feel more powerful... there is a clear sense of absolute wrong... because it is the clear devaluing of life.

That's why there is so much attention of the recent cases in which police took the lives of someone... in the midst of the issues of discrimination and such...there is the question of whether a life was taken that didn't need to be. (The point isn't to suggest anything in particular to any such cases...but just to note that it is the ultimate value of life that is being raised.)

5. Bible Verses about Cities of refuge
Numbers 35:6-34

Deuteronomy 4:41-43

Deuteronomy 19:1-13

Joshua 20:2-9

Also...Habakkuk 2:12

"Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed And founds a town with violence!

Cities of refuge

<http://www.gotquestions.org/cities-of-refuge.html>

6. From promotion of Ms. Monica Pinendo from the Los Angeles District Attorney's office speaking to the New West middle school students March 27th, 2015.