

**Matthew 27:17-26**  
**"Was Terri Not Fit to Live?"**

Matthew 27:17 Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?"

18 For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.

19 While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him."

20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.

21 The governor answered and said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They said, "Barabbas!"

22 Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!"

23 Then the governor said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!"

24 When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it."

25 And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children."

26 Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.

I began writing my Sermon on the Gospel according to Luke on Tuesday, but by the time Wednesday rolled around, I had decided I couldn't preach on that today. At a moment in time when the entire nation is watching and waiting as a woman is slowly starved to death in a case of state authorized Euthanasia, how could I simply act as though it wasn't happening and didn't need to be addressed from a biblical perspective?

While this issue has become very political in the USA, it is not a primarily a political question. It is an ethical question, a particular question of whether or not Terri Schiavo should have been caused to die and a general question of what should be our position on Euthanasia.

Now in answering those questions, what should be our criteria? Should we decide whether or not people should be starved to dead based on notions of utility, quality of life, potential outcomes, medical data or the lack thereof, or even whether or not her husband really loves her? Should we simply go with our *feelings*, and say "*I feel deep down within me that this is wrong?*" Well, perhaps it is, and heaven forbid that we should have *no feelings at all about this issue*. Truly only a monster could do so. But feelings are fickle and misleading, and we all know that there are *strong feelings* on both sides of this issue.

Perhaps we should simply let the Judges decide these critical matters, and then trust that their decision was right, or take a poll of the people and then go with the decision of the majority? Well, what was going on in the text of Matthew that we read? Well Jesus was brought by the Sanhedrin having already judged him themselves to be "worthy of death" to the place of final judgment before Pilate. Now here we have the only totally sinless individual who has ever walked the face of the planet, and he has

already been convicted by one court, the popular opinion, expressed by the Jerusalem mob is that he must die, and in the end Pilate renders a judgment of death against him for the sake of utility. If he is going to keep the peace, and thereby serve the greater good, Jesus *must* die. So the final verdict of the court that day is that an innocent man must die, and a murderer must be set free.

Judges, Courts, popular opinion, high feelings, utility, potential outcomes, all of these factors were brought to bear in the case of Jesus v. Mankind and they all agreed in their conclusion, *Jesus must be put to death*. And yet this was the most radically, and undeniably wrong verdict in all of history!

I hope that this demonstrates to you that none of these things can ever be our criteria for making ethical decisions or coming to judgments on matters of life and death. So what should be our criteria? Well if you come away with only one thing from attending this church, I hope it will be a firm and abiding belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But if you come away with two things, I hope and pray that the second will be the firm belief that the Bible is the Word of God and that it alone must be your final arbiter in every matter of Faith, Life, and Practice. Because it is the inerrant word of God, the bible alone can function as a solid foundation for Christian ethics. And Kids, if you are wondering what Ethics are, they are "all of our rules for living." They are what teach us whether an action is right or wrong.

Well before we can figure out what the Bible says in answer to the question "Was Terri Not Fit to Live?" We need to figure out "what does the Bible say about Euthanasia generally?"

What is Euthanasia anyway? That as I found out is an interesting question to ask. Because as I was doing research for this sermon, I noticed that neither the word nor the practice of Euthanasia occurred in any of my ethical commentaries published prior to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, it wasn't even listed in Webster's massive 1913 dictionary, the first place I found it listed was a Merriam Webster's dictionary from the 50's. The word Euthanasia is a greek compound word – *Eu* meaning "good" and *Thanatos* meaning "death" – therefore "the good death." The term was first coined and widely used by the Nazis in the late 30's in connection with the T4 "Euthanasia" program. Now what the T4 program initially did was take senile adults, handicapped children and infants, the retarded, the brain damaged, the incurably insane and put them to death entirely disregarding the wishes of the patients or the family. Sometimes this was done by injection, occasionally by carbon monoxide gas but usually they were simply starved. The program was run and administered not by the SS, *but by Doctors*. They justified their actions at the time, by describing it as "Therapeutic Killing." They acknowledged that they were killing, but held that they were keeping their hippocratic oaths because this was killing as healing.

Now they did that on two different levels: The first was by saying that they were healing because the people they were killing were in essence a sickness in the body of humanity – let me give you an example of that. *Robert J. Lifton* in his book *the Nazi Doctors* wrote of the following recollection of survivor physician *Dr. Ella Lingens-Reiner*, who pointed to the chimneys of Auschwitz and asked a Nazi doctor, *Fritz Klein*, "How can you reconcile that with your Hippocratic Oath as a doctor?" He answered, "Of course, I am a doctor and I want to preserve life. And out of respect for human life, I would remove a gangrenous appendix from a diseased body. The Jew is the gangrenous appendix in the body of mankind." According to their philosophy a healthy and vigorous humanity had no place for these people, they simply weakened society, drained its resources, therefore they had to be removed.

The second level was by saying that by doing so they were healing by ending suffering, in fact their original orders as given by Hitler were to *"provide "final medical assistance" to those judged "incurable" by physicians who were authorized to end their suffering"* They also often appealed to the "quality of life" argument, the quality of life of the people they were putting to death was unacceptably low.

So the three main arguments advanced for therapeutic killing by these physicians were: *that it served the greater good of humanity, that it ended suffering, and that it was the only solution to an unacceptably low quality of life.*

Surprisingly the allies didn't buy any of these rationalizations and after the War, a "doctors trial" was held at Nuremberg for 23 NAZI doctors involved with the T4 program. Six of these doctors, including Karl Brandt the head of the program, were hanged and five given life sentences.

Because of all this following the Second World War, Europe had to step back and reassess the state of ethics in medicine, they particularly wanted to create a code that would prevent the recurrence of eugenics and euthanasia as acceptable practices within the medical community. The result was the Geneva Code (1948) of the World Medical Association:

*I solemnly pledge myself to consecrate my life to the service of humanity; I will practice my profession with conscience and dignity; the health of my patients will be my first consideration.*

*I will respect the secrets which are confided in me; I will not permit considerations of religion, nationality, race or party politics or social standing to intervene between my duty and my patient; I will maintain the utmost respect for human life even under threat.*

*I will not use my medical knowledge contrary to the laws of humanity. I make these promises solemnly, freely and upon my honor.*

The WMA was for many years absolutely opposed to any reintroduction of discussions of doctors terminating the lives of their patients regardless of their condition. They maintained that the role of a doctor must always be to preserve life, never to take it. However, as time moved on, those safeguards have gotten weaker and weaker, the first domino to fall was doctors not artificially sustaining life, in other words if a person's body was only being kept alive through the functioning of a life support system, and there was "no hope" of recovery, it was acceptable to pull the plug with the permission of the next of kin. *Strictly speaking that is not yet Euthanasia.*

The next domino to fall was allowing someone to choose not to continue medical treatment and thus allowing them to die of natural causes instead of prolonging the process. *This is still not yet Euthanasia.*

The next step however, was in allowing doctors to assist patients deemed to be terminal to die, either by ceasing to feed them or by administering a lethal dose of drugs. *This is Euthanasia: Therapeutic Killing to end suffering.*

After that the floodgates literally opened in Europe: physicians killing those in pain but not necessarily terminal if the patient so desired, Physicians killing the mentally incompetent with degenerative diseases with the permission of their next of kin, and Physicians killing infants with serious birth defects including severe retardation with the parents permission.

The current high water marks are in Scandanavia and Holland, where Physicians after conferring may now elect to terminate cognitive patients with degenerative diseases and infants with severe birth defects without the permission of the patient or the next of kin. *This is Involuntary Euthanasia*, and is *exactly* what we put those Nazi doctors to death for in 1945. So either we wrong then or we are wrong now.

Incidentally the current battle in Europe is over whether doctors may terminate the depressed, but otherwise healthy, if the patient so requests. If the current trajectory holds true, this will be approved and then will progress to doctors terminating the depressed without their permission on quality of life grounds.

Well, lets step back for a moment and figure out whether this is a nightmare or a blessing.

Now this is a *vitaly important question, so I really need you to pay attention*. What gives Human life value? Is it inherently valuable or only instrumentally valuable? In other words, is your life something valuable in and of itself? Is it like Love or Happiness or a vacation or the Sunshine you enjoy on vacation, things that have a value of their own?

Or is your life valuable only as it is an instrument of obtaining something else? Like money which is only valuable because it can be used to obtain something inherently valuable like food or a vacation in the sunshine. This is important because Euthanasia assumes that your life is only valuable as it is the instrument of obtaining something else. Your life has value according to how much pleasure or happiness you can obtain or how your life can be used to obtain benefit for the state. Once your life's instrumental value dips to low, and it can no longer obtain minimum levels of pleasure or happiness and can no longer benefit the state, that is when it becomes time to Euthanize you. That is the heart of the quality of life argument for Euthanasia.

Friends, the Bible tells us that your life is inherently valuable, because unlike anything else in the universe, you bear the *imago Dei*, you were created in the image of God and you have been given an immortal soul. That is why to murder a human is such a heinous wrong, while to kill an animal maybe bad stewardship, but it can never be murder... [Worship Folder] *"You shall not murder. This commandment obviously requires the preservation of life. It is based upon the fact that life is God's gift, and to be taken only at his command. When one murders another, he is taking from him his most valuable possession, life itself. The Scripture lays the highest ground against murder, when it says that if one murders another he has attacked the image of God. Thus murder is a sin directed against God the Creator, in a most open and flagrant way. It is the most enormous wrong that one can commit against his fellow man, and it is an act of impiety against God. What is required then are the proper efforts to preserve human life."* – Morton Smith

As David put it so well in speaking to his creator in Psalm 31 "My times are in your hands" If the bible teaches anything at all, it teaches that as creatures created in His image, only God has power over human life and when it is to be ended, and our authority in this area is delegated in the strictest possible sense. If we terminate a human life without his sanction we commit murder, pure and simple.

So lets begin to talk about how that distinction between inherent and instrumental value plays out, and lets put a human face on it. Before preaching this sermon I asked the Newsom's permission to mention Eric Jr., better known as Boo:

Boo was born prematurely, and as an infant suffered severe brain damage from a hemorrhage. His doctors initially did not think he would live, and advised Eric and Margie to "allow him to die." They refused, and by the grace of God, Boo didn't die. But since that time, Boo has existed in an extremely handicapped condition and has been fed through a tube for most of his life. Through intensive therapy and care, he has been brought to the point where he can crawl, he is learning to stand up and he is gradually learning to say words. However Boo still requires round the clock care, and barring a miracle will never, ever, be able to take care of himself. Had he not received therapy and constant care, I and his parents have no doubt that today he would not be much better off than Terry was.

Now is Boo Newsoms life valuable? Now his parents love the living day lights out of him, but if they didn't would his life cease to be valuable? Measured on the instrumental value scale that Euthanasia proposes as a standard, that little boy doesn't have much value, his life can't get him nearly as much in the way of vacations or sunshine, and forget it on the register of value to the state. But by the grace of God, that secular humanist criteria is not the way we determine the value of a human life!

Although the Nazis would never agree, Boo just as surely as every one of you is a bearer of the image of God, his life is in fact more valuable than any of the non-human parts of creation or all of them put together. All the whales, all the quasars, and super-novas, and canyons, and eagles put together don't come close to the value of the life of Boo Newsom.

How do I know that? I know that for two reasons, first because none of those things were made in the image of God, and none of them have an eternal soul. Someday, all of those whales and canyons and stars will be done away with, but Boo will continue on eternally. Boo will last longer than the grand canyon.

The second criteria is if anything more important, because Christ didn't die to save the whales, or the eagles or the canyons, he died to save humans, great and small, rich and poor, well and unwell. He died for the Boo Newsoms and the Terri Schiavos.

Now you may be saying well, it may have been the will of God to create people like Boo and Terri but it was never his will that they be in the condition they are, and that such a condition cannot possibly bring him glory: *Rubbish!*

*Exodus 4:10 Then Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."*

*11 So the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD?"*

And even those Handicapped people whom he created may bring him glory:

*NKJ John 9:1 Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth.*

*2 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"*

*3 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.*

I've already been graced to see so many ways that the works of God have been revealed in Boo and that God has been glorified in him.

So what of Euthanasia? Should we be starving the handicapped, the retarded, the brain damaged and the sick to death? It is clearly God's revealed will that we protect the defenseless and weakest members of our society. The clear witness of scripture is that we must feed and care for the handicapped, retarded, and brain damaged to the best of our ability. This includes feeding them and taking care of their medical needs. In doing so, no matter how inconvenient it is to us, we are serving God and obeying his will. We should follow the example of David in providing for Mephibosheth and the friends of the Paralytic who went to utmost ends to try to help him, even breaking through a roof and lowering him down into the room where Jesus was preaching. We are just as obligated to them as we are to newborns.

So no, the clear witness of the Bible is that Euthanasia is wrong it is murder. That is what we are talking about at root with Terri Schiavo, we had a moral obligation to feed her and provide for her medical needs. She did not require a machine to breathe for her, or pump her blood, her body simply needed sustenance, and she could have been taught to eat (several nurses fed her orally without aspiration until Michael forbade it) and perhaps to perform other basic functions. Instead all steps have been aimed from the get-go at causing her to die out of "quality of life" concerns. Her parents have throughout been willing to care for her but have been legally prevented from doing so in essence it was said from the very moment that she became brain damaged: *"Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!"* This is an involuntary Euthanasia case, pure and simple, but we have reached the point societally where we have left the concerns of the Geneva code behind us and seem ready to resume the practice of "Therapeutic Killing."

So what do we do? Acts 5:29 But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men.

Eph. 6:11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

And we remember always, that if the value of anything can be assessed by the highest value one is willing to pay for it we should remember that the value of lives is seen in that God paid with his life to redeem the lives of men and women hopelessly handicapped by sin.