

Sermon—January 18th and 19th, 1997
Rich Nathan
The Way to Grace: The Sermon on the Mount Series
Matthew 5:6

Doctor-Assisted Suicide and the Pursuit of Righteousness

This evening [morning] we are hosting two things here at the Vineyard. First of all, as you have just heard, tomorrow [it] is Sanctity of Life Weekend. It is a day that has been set aside by thousands of churches across the United States to commemorate the Roe v. Wade decision which overturned the abortion laws of all 50 states. We, as Christian believers, have a God-given responsibility to uphold the Sanctity of Life. We will be talking about that this morning [evening].

In addition, we are celebrating a water baptism for those who have recently placed their faith in Christ for salvation. We will be doing a baptism at the end of the service tonight [and tomorrow at the 11:00 a.m. service].

Over the last several weeks I have been doing a series from the Sermon on the Mount. And I am going to plunge right in tonight [today] beginning in Matthew 5:1. “Now when he saw the crowds he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him and he began to teach them saying, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.’”

Now, I have been sharing with you my perspectives on the Sermon on the Mount, and particularly, the Beatitudes. I believe that the Beatitudes are ways of orienting our hearts so that we have the capacity to receive God’s grace as it is being poured out. We never merit or

earn the favor and grace of God. And the qualities described here can only be worked in us in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. These are spiritual qualities, not natural ones. The qualities mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount are not temperamental qualities. It is not the way we were born or necessarily the way we were raised. But I believe these are ways for us to put ourselves in the path of God's grace.

In the Beatitude that we will be looking at today, Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." I want you to see first of all that there is a logical order in the Beatitudes. Jesus didn't just randomly throw them together as if being poor in spirit could be at the end and being merciful could be at the beginning. Jesus was a master teacher and he built his messages point upon point. There is a logical order to the Beatitudes. The starting point of the Christian life is poverty of spirit. Nobody can come to God without first acknowledging their need. People who have full hands will receive nothing from God. People who are filled with themselves can expect nothing from God. The only approach to God that God blesses is to come to him empty and in need.

There are some famous lines of a hymn that goes:

“Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling.
Naked come to thee for dress,
Helpless look to thee for grace.
Foul, I to the fountain fly
Wash me Savior or I die.”

That is the heart of what is being expressed by "Blessed is the poor in spirit." We have nothing to offer God, nothing to plead, nothing with which to buy the favor of heaven. The only thing we ever bring to the table with God is our need and our sin. You come to the

table with anything else; the fact that you have prayed, the fact that you have gone to church, the fact that you helped an old woman cross the street, and you can expect to receive nothing from the Lord. The logical starting point of the Christian life, and this is taught throughout the New Testament, is being poor in spirit, empty of self, and empty of merit.

As we realize what we are and who we are that takes us to the second beatitude, we mourn for our sins. “Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.” It is impossible to stare at yourself for very long, as you stand in the presence of God, and not mourn.

It is possible to feel quite good about yourself as you compare yourself with others, especially if you use the standard of people who are doing really poorly. But against the standard of Almighty God, we must see ourselves as broken, wounded, often wounding others. No one can look up to Holy God and get a glimpse of how perfect and patient and kind God is without immediately being aware of their own lack. And so we mourn.

And that leads to meekness. Mourning is something we do in the presence of God. Meekness, in part, has to do with the way we relate to others, particularly others who are challenging us or attacking us or confronting us. Having come out of the presence of God and seeing what we are, it becomes easier to not take a defensive, haughty, superior, self-righteous posture with others. If you just get done saying to God, “Yes, I know I am a sinner. I know I have done wrong in my marriage. I know it is not just my spouse’s fault. I am not all that I should be.” Then when your spouse confronts you, meekness simply echoes the prior thoughts of mourning. Meekness is often the face we show to others. Mourning is the face we show to God.

Which leads to the fourth step in this logical progress and that is hungering and thirsting for righteousness. We come to God emptied of ourselves, empty of merit, mourning for our

sins, meek before others and that creates in us an appetite for being right with God, and rightly internally. So there is this wonderful logical progress where we finally come to the point of desperation. We long for the righteousness that only God can provide.

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, the famous English preacher, saw it as a set of stairs going down starting with being poor in spirit and then descending to mourning and then to meekness and, finally, coming to the very bottom—hungering and thirsting after righteousness. At that point we begin to ascend the staircase through such positive qualities as mercy, purity of heart and peace making. There is a logical order in Jesus' preaching of the Beatitudes.

Now there is also a logical progress from righteousness to peace and joy. I said so many times that we all want to be happy. I don't know anyone who says, "Sign me up for misery. I just want to have a miserable, horrible year and be depressed all year and have nothing go well." All of us would like to be happy. In fact, many parents will say regarding their goals for their kids, "Well, I just want them to be happy." People leave their marriages because they are not happy. People quit their jobs because they are unhappy. The quest for happiness is a major drive in life.

You recall, for those of you who have been here, this word "blessed" in the Beatitudes comes from the Greek word "makarios" which also could be translated as "happy." And so Jesus is teaching us a way to be happy. We want to be. We search for happiness. We also search for peace. People come into counselors because they lack peace. They lack internal peace and peace in their homes. "I am just so tired of fighting." "I want a peaceful home. If we could get along." "I can't stand all of the arguments." There are so many broken families and so many shattered marriages now, so many roommates who don't get along and churches racked with conflict and infighting.

There is a longing for not only happiness, but for peace in our political discussions. Over the last year there has been a national discussion, debate, about the breakdown of civility. That is the word that is being used. It is a quest for peace. The tone of politics has gotten so negative. Everyone is under attack. Everyone has a slash and burn approach to their political opponents. Drivers have become ruder, more violent, and more aggressive. Parents have become more and more concerned about the environment, the ethos, of the culture in which their kids are being raised. The aggressiveness and vulgarity of what is being poured out over the airwaves. Parents in America are deeply concerned about what their children are being exposed to. This is all coming under the heading of a breakdown in civility. Parents are upset with shock radio and the “in your face” Dennis Rodman kicking people, the Howard Sterns and the Madonnas. We want happiness. We want peace.

But most people don't have a clue as to how to obtain either. Sometimes we think that we will find happiness by eliminating pain. We will just find an escape and medicate our pain away and then we will be happy. Or we will find peace in our marriage by getting more money and being able to afford an expensive vacation. Yeah, we fight all the time, but if we could just get away... That is the illusion. If we could just get away and go on an expensive cruise, it will rekindle our romance and all of our problems will disappear. The fact is, couples often discover that their problems are waiting for them the moment their plane touches back down in their home city.

What the Bible teaches is that there is an order to things. One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Romans 14:17 which says, “The kingdom of God is not eating or drinking, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Righteousness, peace and joy. There is an order, first righteousness, then peace and joy. We can't have peace in our homes, which we so desperately want without building that peace on righteousness, on integrity, things like

telling the truth to each other. Roommates need to be able to tell the truth to each other. There can't be any real peace between a husband and a wife if a wife can't tell the truth to her husband and be heard. Let's have a great marriage and pretend that there are no issues. That won't work.

We can't have peace between us while I pretend that you are not an alcoholic. We can't have peace while I am forced to pretend that your parents don't interfere with our marriage when they do. We can't have peace when there is a serious difference or perspective on the way we ought to raise our kids. That can't all be swept under the rug. Some issues need to be talked about. The foundation for lasting peace and for happiness is righteousness.

But it is not just the 5th chapter of Matthew that teaches that or Romans 14:17. But the whole Bible teaches it. The prophet Isaiah says this in Isaiah 32:17, "The fruit of righteousness will be peace. The affect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever." Peace springs from the soil of righteousness. And Isaiah goes on in several places and says, "But on the other hand, there is no peace sayth the Lord for the wicked." You want internal peace while you continue to violate the moral structure of the universe. You can't have it unless you are faking it through some escape. You can't have clean happiness and clean joy without building in on being and doing right. That is just the way that God has set things up because we have to be in harmony with him and his standards to have peace and joy. There is a logical order in this.

And there is a logical progress from legal righteousness, righteousness before God that is to moral and social righteousness. What do I mean by legal righteousness? I am talking about what the Bible often calls justification. Right standing with God. Legal righteousness concerns a verdict, a declaration, by God on your life. Where God through grace issues a verdict over your life that pronounces you "not guilty" in his sight, forgiven, not subject to

any penalty or punishment or disapproval – this wonderful legal verdict of not guilty – justification, is received through faith by trusting in the work of Christ on the cross.

When we look at Christ, we see him as our substitute. We trust him as our sin bearer. We believe that his death on the cross is sufficient to pay the debt that we have run up with God by our sins. We believe that his sacrifice has fully satisfied God and that God issue his stamp of approval by raising Christ from the dead. Simple trust by naked faith plus nothing. A legal verdict is pronounced on your life. You are not guilty.

Many people want to sign up for legal righteousness, this wonderful verdict, without signing up for moral righteousness or social righteousness. Isn't 2 out of 3 or 1 out of 3 good enough? People want to be declared righteousness in God's sight without actually being made righteous. Why become moral if God has already declared me not guilty.

There was a false prophet in the Old Testament named Balaam who felt this way. Balaam was a false prophet, a pagan. In Number 23:10 he said something very notable. He expressed the sentiments of a lot of people in our country today. He said, "Let me die the death of the righteous and may my end be like theirs." Let me die the death of the righteous and may my end be like theirs. An old Puritan commented that Balaam wanted to die the death of the righteous; he just wasn't willing to live the life of the righteous. You know, you can't do that. You know, you can't die the death of the righteous without being willing to live the life of the righteous.

Let me make this plainer. There are lots of folks who think that they will sign up for Christ and for Christianity and that is like cheap and easy fire insurance. Hey, I don't want to go to hell. I don't want to burn forever if there is a place like hell. I don't know if there is. But if there is, I want to make sure that I am not there and that I get all the goodies in the afterlife. I want to go to heaven, so I will accept Christ now and pray the prayer that you

lead me in. I will become justified to use a Bible word. I want to receive that legal verdict of “not guilty,” fully approved and fully accepted. I want that, but I certainly don’t want to change. Don’t start telling me that I have to alter any of my behaviors even one ounce. Don’t you challenge me about my addictions or about my morals. I didn’t sign up for that.

Friends, that is American perversion of Christianity. It is completely unbiblical. Salvation can’t be reduced to a cheap fire insurance policy. The fact is, you can’t sign up for heaven and a verdict of not guilty on your life without here and now desiring to be changed. You can’t sign up for heaven without also here and now pursuing moral righteousness. Hungering and thirsting after righteousness, goes beyond wanting to be forgiven and not wanting to be held accountable for what you have done. Hungering and thirsting after righteousness includes also wanting to be changed, wanting to be different.

Let me put it a little differently. If you want Jesus as your Savior, you must accept him as your leader, your Lord and your Master. Righteousness leads to moral righteousness.

In my journal this week, I jotted down some thoughts: what would it mean for me to be changed morally? What would I look like if I went beyond this declaration of being not guilty to actually being not guilty?

Well, for one thing my attitudes would more and more look like the beatitudes. I would see more and more in myself a poverty of spirit, mourning for my sins, mercy and so on. And then I ought to be bearing the fruit of the spirit. More and more there should be love in my life, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness. All those things should be more and more evident in my life. There ought to be a lessening grip of the flesh. There should be less divisiveness and less arrogance, sensuality and so on. In my life, I ought to be enjoying a closer fellowship with God and ultimately I ought to look more and more like Jesus in my behavior. That is what moral righteousness ultimately is. We are talking about

the standard of Jesus. If you were morally righteous, people would see Jesus when they looked at you or encounter Jesus when they listen to you or feel Jesus when they share with you.

I want to make one other point here. That is there are lots of folks in the US right now who say, “Well why can’t we have social righteousness—peace between nations, peace in racial reconciliation, peace between men and women without moral or legal righteousness? Why can’t we just get along?”

Honestly, that is a pretty superficial view of the way people are. If I don’t honor my vows to my wife, Marlene, I am probably not going to honor political commitments or be the kind of person who would be trustworthy in my political commitments or my business dealings or when I sign my name to an international agreement were I a politician. The fact is righteousness is whole cloth. You can’t separate out moral righteousness from social righteousness and social righteousness from legal righteousness. It doesn’t work that way. It is whole cloth.

Now, what does it mean to hunger and thirst after righteousness? Let me share that I think that hunger and thirst is a fitting image for the kind of attitude that God wants us to have toward righteousness. We are talking about a longing, a pursuit, and an appetite for being right with God and being morally right and being rightly related to others. I think the analogy to appetite really captures it.

Think with me, those of you who are currently dieting, about your appetite or those of you who have historically dieted. I mean in order to maintain a diet, you first of all have to avoid everything that is bad for you. For some of us, our trigger foods are chocolate. For others of you, your death foods are bread or cake or ice cream. Everyone has a certain food or food group that is his or her downfall. If they could just avoid that they would really lose

weight. When I think of hungering and thirsting after righteousness, the first thing that comes to mind is that a person must avoid those things that are bad for them. We have trigger sins just like we have trigger foods. There are certain relationships that are positively harmful to you that you need to avoid. There are certain places that some of you might need to avoid. Certain situations. Part of hungering and thirsting after righteousness is avoiding what is bad, what is deadly to you. Going down certain streets might be deadly to some of you men because there are porno shops there or bars.

Well, Paul tells us that very simply in 1 Cor. 6:18, “Flee from sexual immorality.” You don’t argue with sexual immorality. You don’t try to resist it. It is too powerful. The only way to deal with it is to run from it, to avoid it.

So, in thinking about hungering and thirsting after righteousness, we avoid everything that is bad. You even ought to avoid what dulls your appetite for that which is good. You know, you can dull your hunger, spoil your appetite by constantly eating between meals, snacking all day long. The things that you eat may not necessarily be bad for you, as in the first case, but they can just ruin your appetite for what is good. I think that is where a lot of us live. We are not necessarily engaged in what is bad, but we have dulled our appetite by satiating it with too much of what is not particularly good.

What am I talking about?

You can dull your appetite for God by just filling yourself with too much television. You get up from sitting for four hours in front of the set and you are just dull. Too many videos, too much entertainment, too much time on the computer, too many escapist novels. See, the Lord wants us to hunger and thirst and to fill ourselves with what is good, what is right.

I believe that to hunger and thirst after righteousness is the primary test of conversion. I think this is a test of life. Hunger and thirst is what I look for to see if a decision for Christ really involved the miracle of conversion. Lots of people say that they have decided to follow Jesus, but salvation is not just a human decision. Salvation is a miracle from God. It involves the Holy Spirit entering a person and altering them and infusing them with spiritual life. How do you know that you are truly saved? You are going to see a hunger and thirsting for righteousness that was never there before.

Peter talks about this in 1 Peter 1, “As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby...” See, the characteristics of living, healthy babies are that they immediately start crying to be fed. I want food. I want food. I am hungry. Some of the first words my kids learned were food words—milk. They couldn’t hardly say “mama”, but they could say “cookie.”

Appetite is a test of life. On the other hand, when I see a person who supposedly has made a decision for Christ, but they have no spiritual appetite, the kind of person you have to drag to church, like pulling teeth, the kind of person who has no desire whatever to read the Bible. Yeah, I made a decision for Christ, but there is no internal desire to pray or to read the Bible or to spend time with other Christians or to be in God’s presence or be in the presence of other Christian men and women. I would never go up to such a person and say, “Don’t worry. Everything is fine with your soul. You prayed the prayer ten years ago and all is well with you” because all is not well with you. If you do not see in yourself a hunger and a thirst for the things of God, you need to go back to the root, to the beginning and ask whether a miracle of conversion really has been worked in your soul? Has Christ really invaded you to the core of your being? Sure, I said this, but did anything really take place.

The test of life is hunger and thirst for righteousness. And I believe that is also the secret of spiritual growth. I don't think there is any greater issue in why someone grows than spiritual hunger. Spiritual hunger is the indispensable element that I look for in deciding who to invest in and who to mentor and with whom to spend time discipling. I know that I can teach skills and spiritual disciplines and various truths from the Bible. But if someone is not interested, if they are not hungry, if they are not open and longing for that information, then I am just wasting my time and their time.

John Wimber, who is the president of the Association of Vineyard Churches, has often said that he spends no time trying to motivate the unmotivated. I don't think that we can light a fire under someone. I don't think that is what we are supposed to do as human beings, to motivate each other. I believe that is God's work. God lights fires. God, alone, can produce spiritual hunger. When the hunger is there, then the church can come and feed the hunger and blow on the fire. But if that miracle hasn't taken place in you, you will never grow.

I want to switch gears here a little bit and talk about social righteousness. I have mainly been emphasizing legal righteousness, our right standing before God, and personal righteousness. It is Sanctity of Life Sunday [tomorrow] and I want to spend the remaining time talking about social righteousness. I am afraid that many evangelical Christians, of which this church is a part of the larger Christian world, are known as evangelicalism. I am afraid that many evangelicals have lost their social conscience. They believe that so long as we trust in Christ for salvation and try to morally live upright lives that that fulfills the will of God for our lives.

But the will of God also includes social righteousness—care for the poor, healing people's bodies, ministering to folks who have AIDS or who are HIV positive, support for

widows and the fatherless, a concern for racial reconciliation, visiting people in prison, care for the elderly and a protection of life from the moment of conception to the end in natural death.

Why are evangelicals so stunted in their social righteousness?

In part, I wrote to this in the last Grapevine. I just briefly want to cover the ground that I wrote about. If you haven't got our recent Grapevine, it concerns social righteousness and our perspectives on it here in the Vineyard. But fundamentally, many evangelical Christians have too small a view of God. God has been confined to the area of religion but not in creation. So God is interested in things like church and prayer and Bible reading, but he is not much interested in work and entertainment, food and marriage, sex.

Christians should never have that view of God. They should never have a sacred/secular distinction. The Bible teaches that God is the God of creation as well as the God of religion. God made everything, Genesis 1, and he pronounced the universe to be good. It says in 1 Timothy 4 that everything that God created is good and that nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving. In fact, Jesus renounces religion that was divorced of social righteousness.

We have too small a view of man. A lot of evangelicals are consumed with saving people's souls, but they don't care anything for their bodies. Salvation in the Bible not only includes the soul, but the body. And we are going to be bodily raised from the dead. The Parable of the Good Samaritan is a wonderful example of someone who was commended by Jesus because he cared not just for a man's soul, but also for his body. When the Samaritan saw a person bleeding, helpless, lying in the road, he didn't fulfill his duty to his neighbor by handing him a Christian tract and then walking on feeling like, "I have done my job". At least he will get a chance to have his soul saved. The Samaritan bound his wounds and

provided for his shelter and fed the man. Some of us have too small a view of man that people are just souls and not bodies.

Some people have too small a view of salvation. Salvation is a huge word in the Bible. It is not only the salvation of your spirit, salvation means wholeness, healing. The Greek word is “sozu”. It is healing in all its dimensions. People who are really concerned about salvation ought to care about healing people’s marriages, healing people’s emotional lives, healing people’s sexuality, healing people from addictions. Salvation covers it all. It really speaks to us of the restoration of God’s original plan. Bringing things back to the way they were before Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden.

Part of that restoration concerns social righteousness and the restoration of God’s plan over life. Recently, of course, there has been enormous national discussion and debate regarding Doctor-Assisted Suicide. It is appropriate that we are dealing with Doctor-Assisted Suicide on Sanctity of Life Sunday because of the national debate that has been occurring over the last several years with Dr. Jack Kevorkian’s suicide machine and the numerous arrests. Recently, of course, the Supreme Court heard a right to die case, which could have major implications for the laws of all 50 states. And, even larger implications than the Roe vs. Wade abortion decision. Just this past year, Oregon passed a right to die referendum as an amendment to their constitution. About a week ago, Michigan decided to stop trying to prosecute Kevorkian.

How should Christians feel about the current debate? There are obviously a lot of very complicated questions concerning end of life decisions. Many of the questions I will, of course, be unable to tackle today in the little bit of time remaining in this talk. But let me give you a general framework in beginning to think about Doctor-Assisted Suicide and the right to die from a Christian perspective.

According to the Bible God is the creator and owner of human life. He made people in his own image, Gen. 1:27, and he holds people responsible for unlawfully taking life. The Bible is very clear in the Ten Commandments that you shall not murder. In Genesis 9 God gives some commandments to Noah after the flood. God says this in Genesis 9:5, “I will surely require your life blood, from every beast I will require it and from every man, from every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood by man his blood shall be shed. For in the image of God He made man.”

God holds people responsible for killing other people because we are made in his image and he is the Sovereign. He owns our lives. We do not own our lives. Human life is sacred to God. And for this reason it is even wrong to curse another human being, according to the book of James. The few cases of suicide that the Bible records are all condemned by the Lord because they violate God’s sovereignty over life and attack the sacredness of life. They also are a violation of the stewardship, the responsibility that we have to care for our lives as a sacred trust from the owner of life.

Indeed, up until recently suicide was a felony in almost every state in the country because legislatures, being rooted in a biblical world view, [this goes back to the English common law] understood that life did not belong to us it belonged to God. So attempted suicide was stealing something that belonged to God.

Now, are you saying, Rich, that we should just keep life going at all costs, no matter how horrible the existence?

The Bible does not teach that life should be maintained at any cost. A person does not have to undergo heroic and aggressive medical treatments. In fact, Christians of all stripes have been united that it is appropriate before God to, at times to withdraw life support treatments. But this is not based on some supposed right to die or a condoning of suicide or

Doctor-Assisted Suicide. Christians have always distinguished between the taking of your life or someone else taking your life and the spiritual acceptance of illness and also of death. Christians do not believe in prolonging dying. We believe in prolonging life.

Rich, shouldn't it be a person's own choice? Why shouldn't I have the right to take my own life or to have a doctor assist me in taking my life if that is what I would choose?

This choice argument, by the way, is a very powerful one in modern America. We have so exalted personal autonomy and the right to choose that many Christians and, in fact, most of the culture gives ground on virtually all decisions in the face of an argument on choice.

Well, let's talk about choice for a moment. Would your view of the power of choice in any way change if you discovered that virtually everyone who wants to die is suffering from clinical depression or great physical pain? And once that depression or physical pain is treated, people no longer want to die. Clinical studies prove that the overwhelming majority of people who want to die are either clinically depressed or suffering from great pain.

One study in the Journal of American Medical Association followed up on 886 patients who had tried to kill themselves and were rescued and later treated with psychiatric and social and also Christian counseling services. One sad case frequently commented on involved a 50-year-old woman. They discovered that when people received treatment, only 3% of the 886 patients went on later to try to commit suicide again.

But I still think it should be a person's own choice.

Well, you know, the law has always respected people's choice to refuse medical treatment. If you are an adult and you are competent, you have a right to refuse medical treatment. You have never had to receive medical treatment and you never will have to receive medical treatment if that is your choice. Way back in the Common Law there is this right to not be touched by a doctor if you don't want to be touched.

But now this enshrining of a right to die by law and a right to doctor-assisted suicide or even beyond that, active euthanasia, the killing of a patient by a doctor, goes way beyond the right to refuse medical treatment. And what is really happening is that the power of decision-making is going from the person who is going to be killed. And is being handed off to a physician or to the patient's family.

Friends, I am telling you it is unbelievably naïve if you think that what we are dealing with in these right to die cases are mentally sane, rationally strong individuals who are simply autonomously asserting their right to die as seen in the movies on NBC, ABC and CBS. That is a bunch of malarkey. The truth is that the vast, vast majority of people are clinically depressed, have very little power, find themselves in a hospital by themselves. If you have ever been in a hospital, you know that there is tremendous power vested in the hands of doctors who by a few subtle and not so subtle suggestions can push patients one direction or the other.

This right to choose is really the right of a doctor or a person's family to choose. Because by some subtle and not so subtle suggestions when you are laid up in the hospital and you are depressed, and you are elderly, a doctor and family members who may in fact stand to gain financially can push a person over the edge. You know, it would be better for everyone if you didn't live.

And if you think I am exaggerating the matter, I would simply point you to the Dutch Experience as released in a report called the Remmerlink Report, which is a thorough going study of the Dutch experience with euthanasia over the last fifteen years. In 1981 a high court in Rotterdam gave very strict guidelines for doctor-assisted suicide and active euthanasia, doctor-assisted killing. The guidelines required the patient to be in unendurable pain, the patient had to be conscious, the death request had to be voluntary, there needed to

be two doctors opinions. This was all justified under a right for a person to choose their end.

But the Remmerlink study discovered that an average of three patients per day died from involuntary euthanasia, meaning that doctors actually killed their patients without their knowledge or consent. In fact, what the study discovered was that the majority of all euthanasia deaths in Holland were involuntary. The reason why these deaths were carried out was because the doctor and the patients' families decided that a person had a low quality of life and the family couldn't take it anymore.

It is ironical that during WWII Holland was the only occupied country whose doctors refused to participate in the German euthanasia program. Dutch physicians defied an order to only treat those patients who had a chance of full recovery. They recognized that the Nazi order would violate their duty to care for all patients, including those who didn't have a good chance of recovery. The German officer who gave the order was later executed for war crimes. And now Holland has become the first country where doctors routinely shorten people's lives. Holland's practice led one British journalist, Malcolm Muggeridge to write an essay called The Humane Holocaust. In Muggeridge's essay he says that it is odd that it took only a few decades to transform a war crime into an act of compassion.

See, no matter how many safeguards you have, friends, as a right euthanasia is inevitably applied to those who are chronically ill, those who are disabled, those who are elderly, those who are mentally ill or retarded, depressed. The same rationale says that individuals should have the right to end their suffering, says that comatose and incompetent people should have the right to end their suffering as much as anyone else, even if they can't voluntarily request death.

Euthanasia, by its very nature, is an abandonment of people. And in practice, instead of empowering people to decide, it actually empowers doctors and gives doctors and families the right to kill. You know, once you give a doctor the right to kill, the whole doctor patient relationship is changed. It just shreds trust between a doctor and a patient because when you go to a doctor, you need to know that that doctor is going to be a healer and not a killer. You add to the doctor's treatment options the treatment option of euthanasia and you set it in the context of modern medical cost control and cost containment where doctors are under enormous pressure to hold down costs. And then you confront that doctor with folks who are going to use up enormous amounts of medical resource and medical dollars. And you add to this swirl the hardening of a doctor's conscience with his self-justifying ethic of right to choose—what do you think that doctor is going to recommend to his patient? Sure, go ahead and consume more medical services even though you are elderly, even though you are disabled, even though you will never get back on your feet. Go ahead and consume, even though it is going to cost me money out of my pocket and your family, money out of their pockets.

Right to choose? You know, that is the most naïve argument that can be raised, friends. You have never seen the influence of a physician or family on a person if you think that people are making their own decisions regarding death.

Or what about “I don’t want to live with unbearable pain.” One of the great fears that many of us have is that we will be in such great pain. I want to tell you, friends, that the Bible doesn’t say that it is God’s will for you to suffer unbearable pain without relief or alleviation. In the story of the Good Samaritan, the Samaritan did not say to the wounded traveler, “Suffer on, friend. That is the will of God for you.” Instead, the Samaritan bound up the person’s wounds and provided him with care and with relief. The book of Proverbs

31:6 says, “Give beer to those who are perishing, wine to those who are in anguish. Let them drink and forget their misery.”

It is totally appropriate to relieve pain. I have actually done a lot of reading on the issue of pain management in preparation for this talk. According the sources that I have read, many of whom are neurologists and oncologists, it appears that according the recent medical breakthroughs practically anyone can have his or her pain completely relieved and die in comfort and dignity without being put to death like a dog or family pet. What I mean by dying with dignity is that people do not have to die in a drug-induced coma or stupor. Again, with the kind of pain management therapies that exist right now, people can be quite lucid and have their pain greatly relieved up until the very end.

Why do we hear so much about people being in horrible pain? I think it appears, again, according the reading and research that I have done, that many doctors and nurses in this country are well meaning, but haven’t been trained in modern pain control techniques. Doctors just don’t know how to keep people both comfortable and clear headed. And some insurance plans don’t cover hospices. When someone is in great pain, the first thing they need to do is find a doctor who understands pain management and knows how to treat different kinds of pain—bone pain is different than organ pain, which is different than nerve pain, and so on. To me, death with dignity is not having someone kill you, but it is being provided with the resource that someone’s mental and emotional suffering is relieved and that person can live with dignity and then die a natural death.

Well, what about those with severe disabilities, Rich? The crippled, the developmentally disabled, what about them?

I want to read to you a little testimony by a man named Robert Powell, who is an insurance underwriter in Galveston, Texas. He says, “One day I was playing in my crib and

my parents noticed that I had a problem. I was no longer standing up. My mom tried to pick me up and put me on my feet. I would fall down again. She took me to a doctor because I started to cry a lot more than normal. He did some diagnostic x-rays and saw a mass in my chest. They did surgery on an exploratory basis and when they opened me up they found a tumor located between my heart and lungs. It had already consumed my right lung and had attached itself to the spinal cord, making me a paraplegic. The doctors, at that point, determined that my quality of life had diminished so much that there was no point in trying to do anything. So they just closed me up without taking out the tumor. They said to my parents, "He is not going to live. We are not going to do anything. Take him home to die."

But my parents refused to accept that prognosis and began to talk to other physicians. Another physician was doing research in radiation therapy and wanted to have me as a patient. The irony was that that physician was also a paraplegic. I had an excess of 30 radiation treatments within a one-month period. What he did was literally burn the tumor out of me.

The other physician kept telling my parents that I was not going to live six months. But I did. When I went in for a six-month treatment, they continued to say, "Well, he is not going to live for another year." Well, I was there in another year.

And it continued. They would set a new length of time and I would still be there. It is almost comical because I would keep showing up and they would keep pronouncing me terminal. My physician now tells me that I am not going to live to my 65th birthday. Well, I plan to show up on my 65th birthday and tell the doctors, "Wrong again."

I was one of the cases where some doctor felt that I was better off dead than disabled. I am a paraplegic, but I am not sick. I walk with the assistance of braces and crutches.

Sometimes I use a motorized wheelchair. But I attended private and public schools that were not designed for people with disabilities. I travel extensively. I have gone to Europe.

He finishes up by saying, “The current attitude out there is that when society sees people with disabilities, we should be pitied rather than valued. What our society should be doing is moving toward eliminating certain barriers to people with disabilities, not helping us or encouraging us to die.”

You know, it really is odd that we find ourselves in this current debate today in America because there has only ever been one society that completely legalized mercy killing or euthanasia and that was the Nazi government in Germany. And the tragedy, historically, was that it is completely false that this push to help people terminate their lives and killing people who are terminally ill and suffering all started with Hitler, when Hitler came to power. The truth is the extermination movement started quite a bit before in the early 1920’s. It was started by a psychiatrist named Dr. Alfred Hock and a respected judge named Carl Binding. They advocated that dying or physically or mentally disabled persons should have the mercy of a painless death. It was respected physicians, psychiatrists and judges, not Nazi thugs who killed most of the chronically ill in Germany up until the Second World War. It began by killing Germans, not Jews, but Germans suffering from serious physical defects and as time passed, the reasons for killing became slighter. Bed-wetters were killed. Those who were difficult to educate were killed. An estimated 275,000 people who were in nursing homes and hospitals and asylums were killed.

We cannot get on this slippery slope. We must not. Friends, part of your hungering and thirsting for righteousness would be to strongly and in absolute terms resist what the Pope has called “the Culture of Death”, the so-called “Right-To-Die” “Doctor-Assisted Suicide” “Mercy Killing” active euthanasia. Christians are people who hunger and thirst after

righteousness, and not only legal righteousness before God and personal righteousness, but also social righteousness without which every nation will crumble.

Let's pray.