

Christ the Giver of Life

Revelation 1:17-20

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A lot of things happened in 1973. I was a teenager with a face full of acne and an appetite for adventure. Beth was a cute ten-year-old dreaming of her Prince Charming from Packerland. Notre Dame topped the college football rankings with a perfect 11–0 season (the Indiana Hoosiers exceeded that this year). The Sting took home the Oscar for Best Picture and The Waltons swept five Emmy categories. Gas was about 40 cents a gallon, the minimum wage was \$1.60, and a first-class stamp cost 8 cents. The Sears Tower opened, the Watergate hearings began, the Vietnam War ended... and another war began.

53 years ago, this past Thursday, in their Roe v. Wade decision, the Supreme Court ruled that abortion was a federal constitutional right, dramatically reshaping the moral, medical, and legal landscape of our nation. Although Roe v. Wade was overturned by the Dobbs decision, abortion has not ended. An estimated 65 million preborn lives have been lost in the United States since 1973.

Some pastors have chosen, for various reasons, to remain silent on this topic or to speak for abortion. I don't see either as an option. Where God has spoken, we must speak. My goal is not to be politically correct but to be biblically correct. We're compelled and constrained to communicate God's heart as clearly as we can, with as much compassion as we can. Let me be quick to say if you've had an abortion, or have encouraged someone to have one, there is help and healing available for you.

I want to be upfront about some reasons why I choose to preach on this topic every January and at other times of the year.

1. To equip us to think biblically about the sanctity of life.
2. To mobilize us to respond with courageous conviction and consistent compassion.
3. To offer grace and forgiveness to those who have had an abortion. Many pregnancies are unintended, and studies suggest that by age 45, roughly one in three women will have experienced an abortion. The church must therefore be a place of hope and healing.
4. To prevent some of you, or your friends, from getting an abortion.
5. In short, I pray that this sermon ends up saving babies.

Many years ago, a clip went viral of a Home Depot employee who was standing near a shopping cart when a baby fell out, and he dove to catch the child just before she hit the concrete floor. This brings new meaning to Home Depot's motto: "*More Saving. More Doing.*"

We affirm, along with thousands of other churches, that every person from conception forward is an image bearer of God, stamped with divine dignity and worthy of catching. It's my prayer that there will be more saving and more doing done by each of us.

Proverbs 14:25 summarizes our purpose and our hope: "***A truthful witness saves lives, but one who breathes out lies is deceitful.***" We must demonstrate the courage to stand on behalf of those who can't speak for themselves while nestled in their mothers' wombs. Scripture compels us to do no less. Proverbs 31:8-9 declares: "***Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.***"

After all, there are only four differences between a preborn child and any other human being:

- Size.
- Level of development.
- Environment/location.
- Degree of dependency.

It's time for the reborn to speak for the preborn.

I submit that while abortion is, and should be debated politically, discussed emotionally, and described medically, at its primary roots, abortion is a moral issue, and as such, must be defined biblically. I have preached a sanctity of life message every year for nearly 40 years, but this will be the first time I've done so from the Book of Revelation.

Regarding the sanctity of life, where you start determines where you stand. If you start with secular autonomy, you'll believe and behave one way; if you anchor your life to biblical authority, you'll value all of life as a gift from the Creator. In other words, your position is shaped by your starting point:

- If you start with the preborn as a person made in the image of God, you will protect and preserve life.
- If you start with a woman’s right, you’ll justify whatever feels right.
- If you start with Jesus, you will recognize Him as the Author of life, who has authority over life, and you’ll submit to His definition of what is right.

Last week, we worshiped as we focused on the description of the glorified Christ, found in Revelation 1:14-16: ***“The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.”***

We saw how a *right vision of the risen Savior transforms how we view suffering.*

Revelation 1:17-18 gives us John’s response: ***“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.’”***

Today, we’ll celebrate how a *right vision of the risen Savior transforms how we view the sanctity of life.*

Embrace Right Devotion

When encountering the Savior, John expressed reverent devotion.

1. View Jesus as majestic. Verse 17 begins, ***“When I saw him...”*** The word ***“saw”*** means, ***“to see with perception and understanding.”*** To reinforce what we learned last weekend, we’re to move beyond first impressions of casual familiarity to behold the risen, radiant, reigning Lord of glory. We need to see Him as He really is, not whatever inadequate picture we may have stored in our minds. He’s not the “big guy in the sky” or the “man upstairs.” I appreciate the definition of God from the Westminster Confession: ***“God is the eternal, self-existent, and infinite Creator of all things, perfectly wise, holy, just, good, and sovereign over all. He is one in essence, yet three in persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and is the only proper object of worship.”***

Consider what happened to Isaiah when he saw the Lord in Isaiah 6:5: ***“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a***

people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”
Spurgeon writes, “*The secret of sanctification is to keep the eye fixed on Christ, and sin will gradually drop off like a garment.*”

When we see Christ’s majesty, we realize that every human being is an image-bearer of *this* King. Our devotion to Him compels us to honor what He has created.

2. Fall at His feet in meekness. The only proper response to His majesty is to hit the ground before the Lord as we see in the next phrase in verse 17: “*...I fell at his feet as though dead.*” One commentator writes: “*The Son of Man is so awesome, so glorious, and so terrifying, that John falls at his feet like one stricken by a heart attack.*” Falling down in worship plays a central role throughout Revelation:

- 4:10: “*The twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever...*”
- 5:14: “*...and the elders fell down and worshiped.*”
- 7:11: “*All the angels were standing around the throne...and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God.*”

Daniel fell on his face when he encountered the glory of God (Daniel 10:7–9). The wise men fell to the ground and worshiped the Christ child (Matthew 2:11). Simon Peter fell at Jesus’ knees, overwhelmed by His holiness (Luke 5:8). Saul of Tarsus was struck to the ground when he met the risen Lord on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:4). Falling down is the instinctive response to God’s glory.

The Greek text literally reads, “*I became dead.*” This is the ultimate admission that we do not own our own lives. We are creatures, not the Creator. Interestingly, before the resurrection, according to John 13:25, John was “*leaning back against Jesus,*” and now, in the presence of the penetrating gaze of blazing fire of King Jesus, he is completely undone. Nancy Guthrie writes, “*To fall at the feet of Jesus is to finally come to the place that our reputation doesn’t matter anymore, our pride doesn’t matter anymore. It is to come to the place that Jesus is all that matters.*”

On Wednesday in the Fireside Room, I met with a young man who said he was ready to repent of his sins. After going through the gospel with him, he said he was ready to receive Christ. Immediately, he pushed part of the sectional furniture out of the way, dropped to his knees, repented of his sins, and asked Jesus to save him.

He told me he had just started reading Anchor for the Soul before he met with me. In fact, he was in a Qwik Star gas station in Davenport while waiting for some food and read the section about writing your name and date in the book to indicate one's readiness to receive Christ. Amazingly, he did that about 30 minutes *before* I met with him. I asked if he had received Christ in the gas station and he said, "No...but I took care of it just now!" Incredibly, he wrote down his name and the date even before getting saved! Here's a picture.

3. Receive His mercy. John falls at Jesus' feet as though dead, but the risen and reigning Christ responds not with judgment, but with grace. After hitting the ground in meekness after encountering the majesty of Jesus, John experienced mercy in verse 17: "...**but he laid his right hand on me...**" Jesus used the power of touch to communicate compassion and comfort. The "**right hand**" in the Bible represents a position of strength. It's also the hand where a person would hold what is precious to him. In addition, it's the hand of commissioning and consolation.

Friend, no matter what you've done, Jesus is filled with compassion toward you as He reaches down to help and to heal, to forgive, and to set free. The sanctity of life includes compassion for the fallen and for the frightened; for the little, the least, and the lost. Just as Jesus reached out His hand to John, the sanctity of life is about God's mercy reaching into our frailty.

4. Obey His mandate not to be afraid. The command to, "**fear not**" is found many times in the Bible. The idea is not to be terrified and literally reads, "*stop being afraid.*" We see this in Matthew 17:7: "**But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Rise, and have no fear.'**" Many of us have Isaiah 41:10 memorized: "**Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.**"

Some of you are afraid to change. It's been said, "*We change when the fear of change is finally outweighed by the cost of staying the same.*" We change when the fear of change is overcome by trust in a faithful Savior.

A right vision of the risen Savior transforms how we view the sanctity of life.

Embrace Right Doctrine

Brothers and sisters, when we walk through seasons of crisis, we must stand firmly on Christology, which literally refers to, *“the study of Christ.”* We must know who Jesus is, what He has done, and what He continues to do. In moments when feelings fluctuate and fear threatens to paralyze us; we must not rely on rationalizations or excuses. Our spiritual devotion and our decision-making must always flow out of solid doctrine.

We are called to engage our faith in the ever faithful One, our risen, reigning, and returning Lord. As Hebrews 13:8 says, ***“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”*** Because He is steady and faithful, we can stand firm. Because He is full of grace and truth, we can respond with both conviction and compassion.

1. Jesus is sovereign over life. In the last part of verse 17, Jesus declares: ***“...I am the first and the last.”*** The words ***“I am”*** hearken back to the covenant name for Yahweh: ***“I am who I am”*** in Exodus 3:14. In addition, the title, ***“first and last”*** can be translated, *“From eternity to eternity,”* and was used in the Old Testament for God as we see in Isaiah 41:4: ***“Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he.”*** In Revelation 22:13, Jesus declares, ***“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”*** Jesus equates Himself with God because He is God.

I see three implications related to the sanctity of life:

- Because life begins and ends with Jesus, He defines reality, not culture, convenience, or our courts.
- Because life does not originate with us, it does not belong to us.
- Because Christ is first and last, everything in between matters. Because He is the first, life begins with Him. Because He is the last, life is accountable to Him. He is before all and He is after all. Life is sacred because it is from Him and it is for Him. No life is an accident, disposable, or optional.

He is there at the moment of conception and present at the moment of our final breath. Life is sacred because its boundaries are set by the Sovereign God. Life does not begin with human choice, nor should it end by human choice. Every life matters, born and preborn, because every life is made by the Master and exists under the sovereign rule of Christ, who is at the beginning, the middle, and the end of all things. When we lose sight of who Jesus truly is, we lose our grip on why every life is sacred. In a world that increasingly treats life as a commodity or

choice, biblical Christology calls us back to worshipful awe and humble submission.

It's all about Jesus. He's the starting point and the end point, and everything in between. I applauded how the elders of Cities Church in Minneapolis responded after agitators jarringly disrupted their worship service last Sunday.

Jesus is real. When we gather on Sunday mornings to worship Him, we are gladly giving ourselves to what is most central and sacred in our life together...we welcome respectful dialogue about present issues, and about how the realness of Jesus, as revealed in the Bible, provides the only final answers to the world's most complex and intractable problems. Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, lived, died, and rose again for the rescue of all who put their faith in Him. He offers a love that transcends cultures, borders, policies, and politics. As those who have been loved and rescued by Him, we will not shrink from worshiping Jesus, nor will we stop "teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah" (Acts 5:42).

Brothers and sisters, whatever cultural, political, or moral issue we are faced with, make this statement your starting point: "*Jesus is real.*" Because Jesus is real, our gospel partners in the Twin Cities have given themselves "*to what is most central and sacred in our life together...Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, who lived, died, and rose again for the rescue of all who put their faith in Him.*"

2. Jesus is the Savior of life. We see the gospel in a nutshell in verse 18: "***And the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore...***" This designation is based on Old Testament references to the "***living God***" (Joshua 3:10; Psalm 42:2) and declares in His essential nature that Christ possesses life, in sharp contrast to the inanimate and dead gods of paganism. The Son of God was a living embryo in Mary's womb, was born, and lived for over thirty years.

He experienced death and rose again on the third day and is alive forevermore according to Revelation 4:9, which says He: "***lives forever and ever.***" The word "***behold***" introduces a statement of amazement and wonder. As the way, the truth, and the life, Jesus is life, He has life, and He is the source of both physical and eternal life. Romans 6:9 declares: "***We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again.***" In Revelation 2:8, Jesus says, "***The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.***" His resurrection declares that every life, at every stage and age, is worth living and worth defending.

The cross and the empty tomb illustrate the immeasurable value of human life, because Jesus was willing to give His life to redeem us. The sanctity of life is grounded in the gospel because Jesus values life enough to lay down His own life for the lives of the helpless and hopeless.

The fact that Jesus would die to save human life proves the infinite value He places on life.

He who creates life longs to recreate life through the new birth. He is the eternal, self-existent, uncreated one who is alive forevermore to intercede for us here and to welcome us into the hereafter.

3. Jesus is the sustainer of life. In the next phrase of verse 18, Jesus declares, ***“...and I have the keys of death and Hades.”*** How many of you have ever lost your keys? Me, too. According to one survey, roughly 30% of Americans lose their keys at least once a month.

Why do we panic when we can't find our keys? Because keys represent access, ownership, and authority. If you have the keys, you're in. If you don't, you're stuck outside. In the Bible, the word ***“keys”*** refers to exclusive authority and unlimited access. Those with keys can open and shut what is locked up. The good news is these keys belong exclusively to Jesus Christ. Because of that, we can and must surrender our need to always be in control.

He has the ***“keys of Death and Hades,”*** which refers to the invisible world, the realm of the dead, or the grave, known as *Sheol* in the Old Testament, and *Hades* in the New Testament. Nancy Guthrie writes, *“Because Jesus is in charge of life and death, Jesus says to you and me today, ‘I’ve got the keys in my hand to the place of the dead. No one goes there unless and until I open that door. I hold the keys because I died. I went into the place of the dead myself and emerged with the keys in my hand.’”*

In Revelation 3:7, Jesus introduces Himself to the faithful church in Philadelphia as ***“the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.”*** This is a direct echo and fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Since Jesus holds the key of David, then He alone defines when life begins, when it ends, and its sacred value. Life isn't ours to open or shut by choice; it's under the authority of the One who is holy and true, who opens and no one shuts.

I appreciated this perspective: “*Christ alone holds authority over life and death. Because He holds the keys, no human being has the right to decide whose life is expendable and whose is worthy of protection.*”

If Jesus holds the keys, no person has the right to play god with life. Because He alone holds the keys, we recognize that no human authority has the right to prematurely end what God is sustaining.

4. Jesus is the source of light and life. We see this in verse 20: “*...and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*” Jesus walks among His churches and has positioned each assembly in neighborhoods and among the nations to shine the light into a culture of confusion and deep darkness. Edgewood is called to shine the light of the Lord by proclaiming truth, extending compassion, and defending the little, the least, and the lost.

As a church, we are a lampstand for the light of the Lord; we’re not a courtroom where we’re called to judge those who sin differently than we do. Since Jesus was filled with truth and grace, we will continue to speak convictionally about sin while speaking compassionately to sinners.

This week, I read a convicting post called, “How to Fight for Life When Abortions are Invisible.” It helped me see the challenges we face. Here are some excerpts.

“The abortion numbers are going up...because it’s easier than it ever has been for a woman to get access to the pills,” said Herbie Newell, president and executive director of Lifeline Children’s Services. By 2018, the pills—often referred to as medication abortion—accounted for around 40 percent of all American abortions. Five years later, that number was up to 63 percent. Heartbeat International projects that medication abortions will account for virtually 100 percent of abortions by the year 2030.

More than a million pregnancies were aborted in 2024—up 20 percent from 2017, when abortions hit an all-time low of about 860,000. Newell continues, “*We need laws restricting abortions, and we should always advocate for them. But they’re not going to change the hearts and the minds of people...that’s why we need the church, because it’s the gospel that’s going to actually change the heart. It’s the gospel that makes it safer for babies in the womb.*”

Sarah Zylstra writes: *“It doesn’t help that Christians are increasingly unclear about abortion. In 2025, less than half of churchgoers described themselves as pro-life (43 percent), down from 63 percent in 2023...and only 51 percent said the Bible is clear and decisive about the morality of aborting an unborn child, down from 65 percent two years ago.”*

Newell adds, *“We have to move the pro-life argument away from politics and recapture the imago Dei argument in the pulpit. The whole reason Christ Jesus came is because life is sacred. If our lives didn’t matter, Jesus never would have had to come...the imago Dei, the sanctity of life, is not complementary to the gospel. It is part of the gospel advancement—God made life in his image, redeems life in his image, so that life in his image will flourish and make disciples.”*

Good theology is the one thing sturdy enough to stand up against a cheap, readily available, private abortion experience. Whitehurst says it well, *“Ultimately, abortion is a heart issue. How we see God, and then how we see our situations and his hand in our lives, even with those unplanned things, plays a big role.”* When asked if he’s discouraged, Newell says he is actually encouraged: *“God also tells us to give this world a taste of what heaven will feel like, so that those that are perishing may taste it. And in the end, our God—the Creator, Author, and Sustainer of life—wins.”*

We believe in the sanctity of life because Jesus alone is sovereign over life, He is the Savior of life, He is the sustainer of life, and He is the source of life. Every life matters, not based on quality or usefulness, but because every human is made in the image of God. As such the term “Sanctity of Life” isn’t just a slogan; it’s a theological reality rooted in the identity of Jesus Christ. Life is not ours to define; it is His to defend.

I want to end by celebrating how God has been using Pregnancy Resources, one of our Go Team Partners. Here’s what God did in 2025.

- 5,382 visits
- 1,903 individual served (1,423 women and 480 men)
- 671 pregnancy tests
- 640 ultrasound appointments

- 91% of clients who were undecided, planning an abortion, or at risk of an abortion, chose life!
- 327 babies born to clients
- 916 specific spiritual discussions
- 1,071 (57%) of clients had no spiritual belief or were non-Christian
- 1,099 opportunities to interact with men
- 141 participated in classes/mentoring
- 4,173 packages of diapers provided
- 279 new baby gift bags
- 584 cans of formula
- 145 car seats provided

In the last 15 years, over 45 people from Edgewood have served at Pregnancy Resources. I asked PR to put together a breakdown of donations given by Edgewood.

Go Team Partner giving to date:	\$110,537
Baby Bottle Project giving since 2002:	\$106,906
Giving for the Mobile Medical Unit:	<u>\$51,555</u>
 Total Edgewood giving:	 \$269,001

Pregnancy Resources will be presenting Edgewood with a Legacy Leaf for the Tree of Life on Saturday, February 21, at 2:30 pm to celebrate all that Edgewood has done on behalf of mothers, fathers, and babies. Everyone is invited.

A right vision of the risen Savior transforms how we view the sanctity of life.

A lot of things happened in 1973. I can't wait to see what God will do in 2026 as God gives us the conviction to refuse silence and the courage to stand on devotion and doctrine as we speak on behalf of those who can't speak for themselves.

Gospel Invitation

Closing Song: "Let the Children Come."