

### Lecture 3, Winter English Camp, December 2006

Good morning, everyone. Or, is it a good morning? How many of you think it is a good morning? How many of you think it is a bad morning? How many of you have no opinion? Well, that's fine, we don't have to agree on it. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion. We have opinions about many things. But, is everything just a matter of opinion? What about things like the origin and value of human life? About the purpose of life? About what happens after we die? Are these things also a matter of opinion?

Maggie knew she was trash. That was the opinion of the people she went to school with, her teachers, and many of the people in her town. So, she left the town and tried to find a way to become a person with worth: a person others would recognize and cheer for. She lived for this recognition. She built her life on the shifting sands of popularity and human opinion.

Joni had recognition. She was rich and pretty and smart and popular - just check out the high school yearbook. When she lost most of that, it was a shock. It took her some time to discover what her parents, sisters and friend already knew; that Joni Ericsson was not her money or her face or her marks in school. She was a person made in God's image, with a mission to glorify God in her life, whatever turns it took along the way. So, she made a decision. She would build her life on the Rock, Jesus Christ, the Word of God. She would accept her limitations and strive to discover what she could do.

God said she was important. God said her life was from Him and must not be given up or thrown away until He said so. It didn't seem to be true. Most people would look at her and see damaged goods: some one who couldn't produce. Someone with no value to society; just hogging a hospital bed that could be given to someone who could be fixed. In an evolutionary value system, she was a liability, an impediment to the survival and the advance of the species.

You see what can happen if you let things like the value of human life become a matter of opinion. Currently opinion is swinging in favor of euthanasia. The movie "Million Dollar Baby" is a powerful statement of that opinion, designed to get more people to accept that way of seeing the value of human life. The sands are shifting away from heroic efforts to "fix" people to writing off the more difficult cases. This could easily have a big effect on your life in the future.

So, how will you determine the value of your life and the lives of others? Will you go with popular opinion, and hope you can stay on your feet and produce to survive? Or, will you accept God's Word; that you and others are made in His image, and are not to be lightly discarded?

But, wait. What is the use of struggling so in life? Why should we have to settle for such a limited existence, if we have an unfortunate accident?

One day Jesus was asked a question about a blind man. This man was blind from birth, and the people around wanted to know if his blindness was because he had sinned, or because his parents had sinned. So often we want to assign blame for people's misfortunes. Jesus said the man was this way to bring glory to God. Now, that sounds dumb. How can God be glorified by a blind beggar, a drag on society, a public nuisance? Jesus showed them how: he healed the man, and used him to show what God can do for us.

Well, sure. It would be great if God would heal everyone. Or better yet, not make disabled people in the first place.

At this point, we need to think a bit about disabilities. In Ephesians, the Bible says "You were dead in your transgressions and sins." Often we do things we know to be wrong. We excuse ourselves, saying it's just something everyone does, or that it couldn't be helped in the circumstances. But, these things transgress God's law. They are sins. They are offensive to God. They mean that we cannot go to Heaven and live with God. We see healthy people

around us; people that are good looking and have jobs and can take care of themselves. But, God can see their hearts. What does He see there? He sees poor, blind beggars; helpless and lost morally. The disabled of our world allow us to see ourselves as God sees us. They are a reminder that all is not well. There is injustice in the world; suffering, deformity, inequality. And, many of us just thank our luck that we are not like that, and get on with helping ourselves and leaving the disabled to fend for themselves. Or, if they are too far gone, helping get rid of them. Ow. That's harsh. But it is uncomfortably close to the truth.

The disabled are God's messengers to us; they help us ask the hard questions about the meaning and purpose of life, and seek really good answers: answers on the Rock of God's truth and not on the sands of human opinion.

And, the disabled who have come to know God's truth see a great future. They don't see long years of suffering and dependance ending in a death that is a relief to those around them. They see a passing from this world to the next. They see a passage into Heaven. The Bible says that God will wipe away all our tears, that there will be no suffering or death in Heaven. We are to receive a new body; a whole body that will never die. Joni mentioned that in her message in the movie. She will stand on strong, healthy legs in Heaven, and praise God forever. This life is only a preparation for the next. She finally realized it was better to be stuck in the wheelchair knowing Jesus as Savior than to be physically healthy with a crippled soul.

We don't see everything with our eyes. The opinion people have of us is based on outward appearances; it shifts like sand as our fortunes change. We are like the blind beggar. We need Jesus to open our eyes to see what our hearts look like to Him. Then we can build our lives on the unchanging Rock of God's truth. We discover that we are not just disabled, but dead! Our souls are not alive to God. We must admit to our transgressions and sins, and ask God to forgive us on the basis of Jesus' death for us on the cross. Then we can be born again. Our hearts will be healed. Our lives will be standing on the Rock.

Whatever happens to us or to others around us, our value before God will never change. One more thing: the story of Maggie Fitzgerald is fictional. It was designed to forward an agenda for euthanasia. It is based on a naturalistic, evolutionary worldview. Public opinion is changing, and the sand is shifting.

But these things are not a matter of opinion. The story of Joni Erricson is true. She is alive today, helping disabled people to find hope and meaning in their lives. She is a special servant of God. How could I speak to a disabled person? Why should they listen to me? I don't know what their life is like. But Joni does. She is not giving an opinion, she is stating truth that has been proven in her life, in her struggles and suffering. God loves us. God values us. Our lives are not our own. We are created in God's image to do God's work. We must admit and forsake our selfish, sinful behavior and accept Christ's salvation. Then, as God's children, whatever our circumstances, we can build our lives on the Rock, not on the sands of human opinion.