

# Gendercide

A Sermon Delivered By  
**Dr. Michael Bledsoe, Pastor**  
Riverside Baptist Church  
Washington DC

---

November 9, 2014  
[November 15, 2009]

text▷ John 8: 1 while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. 3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, 4 they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. 5 Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 6 They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground.[a] 9 When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. 10 Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

---

Jesus counter-acted the obliteration of women. Keep that in mind as I recall some recent acts of destruction perpetrated against women and girls.

Reyhaneh Jabbari, a 26 year old Iranian woman, was hung to death on October 25th of this year for having stabbed to death her rapist. She had been hired when she was 19 years old by her assailant, as an interior designer. She stabbed him after he sexually assaulted her, according to UN and Amnesty International reports.

Mariam Ibrahim, a Sudanese Christian woman, was sentenced to death in her native country because of her faith. Miriam's ordeal started when a Muslim relative filed a criminal complaint saying she had married Daniel Wani, a Christian. A Sudanese court considered her a Muslim because her father was Muslim. She was charged with adultery on grounds that a Muslim woman's marriage to a Christian man is illegal in Sudan. Ibrahim also was charged with apostasy, accused of illegally renouncing what was alleged to be her original faith. Eventually under international pressure, Sudan released her and she and her husband and two young children flew to New Hampshire in July where they live.

Eight-year-old Relisha Rudd went missing this past March after her mother entrusted her in the care of a janitor who worked at the homeless shelter where the family lived in Washington, D.C. She was last seen on March 1 at a motel with 51-year-old Khalil Tatum. He had worked as a janitor at the homeless shelter where her family lived. Tatum's wife's body was found at the motel in Oxen Hill, Maryland. Was Relisha sold into sex trafficking? Was she killed? We still do not know and as with so many of these cases, we may never know.

Hannah Graham, an 18 year old sophomore at the University of Virginia, went missing September 13th of this year. Her remains were found some five weeks later and now there is a possible link with the murder of 20 year old Virginia Tech student, Morgan Harrington, who went missing from a Metallica concert in October 2009. There are also possible links to the disappearances of two other Virginia residents, Alexis Murphy, 17 and Samantha Clarke, 19.

On Sunday, November 2nd at 9:40 pm, nursing assistant Carlesha Freeland-Gaither, 22, was violently abducted while walking along a Philadelphia street. Thankfully, three days later, she was rescued and her assailant arrested.

And all of us are now familiar with the brave girl from Swat, Pakistan, Malala, who on October 9, 2012, along with three of her female colleagues, was shot in the head by the Taliban. This brave young woman has just won the Nobel Peace Prize, along with Mr. Kailash Satyarthi who also works for the education of children. Malala wrote in her book, I Am Malala, that of fifty million illiterate adults in Pakistan, two thirds are women. She was nearly killed because she believed girls should be educated.

These incidents might seem too many to recount for a sermon on a Sunday, but the truth is, we would be here until next year reading the names of the disappeared, the sold, the raped and the murdered of women in communities across the world. It is not too strong a word to say that what we have been witnessing for decades now is Gendercide. These accounts do not even take into consideration the daily harassment and abuse that women must navigate just to do ordinary things, let alone extraordinary feats.

Why address this? Because not to speak to this is to be complicit with a terrible evil; because our Lord had women in his inner circle, though you'd be hard pressed to know that if you relied only on men preachers; because Christ acted to safeguard and speak with women including them in his mission and ministry; because the Gospel narratives are not only strange in that a Crucified man overcame death and the grave, but that news was handed first to women who in that time and culture were not trusted as witnesses in any court. Hence, we do not practice gender apartheid in this church. We don't append the title *deacon* with e-s-s for women who serve just as honorably and faithfully as men nor do we blaspheme God who, Genesis tells us, made human beings, male and female, in God's image. I also speak to this because I am the father of two

wonderful daughters who grew up in this church where they were served holy communion by women and listened to women preach from this pulpit. Kirsten wrote about her church in an application she made years ago to a university. Listen to what she said about your church:

“The day I was born, my father was called upon to pastor Riverside Baptist Church in Southwest D.C. For my whole life, I have attended, volunteered at, and loved my church home. Beyond anything else about Riverside, the congregation has been the most influential facet on my life.

Long before my family arrived at Riverside, it was an interracial and diverse place of worship. Over the years, it has only increased in that sense. As a child, the fact that I was being brought up in a predominately African American church never occurred to me. However, it has definitely affected the person I am today. Growing up at Riverside has made me much more sensitive to issues such as racism and all forms of bigotry... Beyond being just racially diverse, Riverside is also inclusive, described as “welcoming and affirming.” Just as growing up within a predominately African American church has made me sensitive to racism, growing up in [an inclusive] church has made me sensitive to homophobic bigotry. Riverside is also very female empowering which has formed my belief that women are, and should be, included in the assertion that ‘all men are created equal.’... To grow up in a place like Riverside is very unique, though I wish it was not.”

You are a wonderful church, a needed sanctuary in a world that hurts and even destroys girls and women. In the book, Half The Sky, written by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl Wudunn, are many stories, both joyful and sad, about girls and women in our world. Having read their book years ago, I was convinced then, and am no less convinced now, that we are witnesses to Gendercide. Listen to Kristoff and Wudun:

The Nobel Prize-winning economist, Amartya Sen “has developed a gauge of gender inequality that is a striking reminder of the stakes involved. ‘More than 100 million women are missing,’ Sen wrote in a classic essay in 1990 in *The New York Review of Books*...Sen noted that in normal circumstances women live longer than men, and so there are more females than males in much of the world. Even poor regions like most of Latin America and much of Africa have more females than males. Yet in places where girls have a deeply unequal status, they vanish... Professor Sen found...that about 107 million females are missing from the globe today. Follow-up studies have calculated the number slightly differently, deriving alternative figures for ‘missing women’ of between 60 million and 101 million. Every year, at least another 2 million girls worldwide disappear because of gender discrimination.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl Wudunn, Half the Sky, (Kindle reader location 124-37).

What we are talking about here is the intentional oppression of half the population of the earth based upon their gender. From gender selection at conception by way of abortion to infanticide and the refusal to provide health care to girls; from the trafficking of girls from rural villages to urban brothels to rape wielded as a weapon of war; from isolation and no education to maternal mortality due to lack of prenatal care and health services; gendercide is taking place in our world, in our time.

“The equivalent of five jumbo jets’ worth of women die in labor each day, but the issue is almost never covered.”<sup>2</sup> One study found “that thirty-nine thousand baby girls die annually in China because parents don’t give them the same medical care and attention that boys receive—and that is just in the first year of life. One Chinese family-planning official ... explained it this way: ‘If a boy gets sick, the parents may send him to the hospital at once. But if a girl gets sick, the parents may say to themselves, *Well, let’s see how she is tomorrow.*’ The result is that as many infant girls die unnecessarily every week in China as protesters died in the one incident at Tianamen. Those Chinese girls never received a column inch of news coverage...”<sup>3</sup>

“In India, a ‘bride burning’—to punish a woman for an inadequate dowry or to eliminate her so a man can remarry—takes place approximately once every two hours, but these rarely constitute news. Just in the last nine years in the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Pakistan, five thousand women and girls have been doused in kerosene and set alight by family members or in-laws—or, perhaps worse, been seared with acid—for perceived disobedience. Nicholas Kristof of the New York Times and his wife Sheryl Wudunn confess their own oversight of these horrific numbers writing, “When a prominent dissident was arrested in China, we would write a front-page article; when 100,000 girls were routinely kidnapped and trafficked into brothels, we didn’t even consider it news.”<sup>4</sup>

As Kristof and Wudunn note, the global statistics on the abuse of girls are numbing. “It appears that more girls have been killed in the last fifty years, precisely because they were girls, than men were killed in all the wars of the twentieth century.”<sup>5</sup> You will just have to let that sink in. It is nearly too horrific to comprehend. To their credit, Kristof and Wudunn have begun a movement to abolish the slavery of women, the ruin of girls and the deaths of mothers. I commend them for their bravery in confronting the issue of gendercide and not

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, location 1938-46.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., location 108-14

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., location 115-23

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., location 160-68

for just sharing stories that will make the hair stand up on the back of your neck, but for sharing hopeful stories, stories of liberation and redemption, of courage and strength. They share many, many remarkable stories in their book but let me share just one of those that deeply touched me.

Sray Rath is a self-confident Cambodian teen-ager who, at age 15, decided she would work to help her parents who had run out of money. She decided to work as a dishwasher in Thailand. She traveled there with four friends who had been promised jobs in the same restaurant. The job agent took the girls deep into Thailand and then handed them off to gangsters who in turn took them to a brothel in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. There she was shattered to discover where she had ended up. Her boss beat and drugged her until she complied. They were kept naked to make it more difficult to run away. They were never allowed out nor given a penny. The door to their apartment was locked on the outside. But one evening the girls, desperate, wedged a five inch wide board between their balcony and the one on the next building some twelve feet away. Rath sat on the board and gradually inched across. Once across, she and her four friends pounded on the window and the tenant allowed them to leave by the front door. Once in the street, they found a police station but then they were arrested for illegal immigration. Rath served one year in prison and was supposed to be repatriated. She thought a Malaysian policeman was escorting her home when he drove her to the Thai border only to sell her to a trafficker, who peddled her to a brothel.

The brothel owners in Thailand did not beat her or guard her constantly. Two months later she escaped. Upon her return to Cambodia, she met a social worker who put her in touch with an aid group that helps girls who have been trafficked start new lives. The group, American Assistance for Cambodia, used \$400 in donated funds to buy a small cart and a starter collection of goods so that Rath could become a street peddler. She found a good spot in the open area between Thai and Cambodian customs offices in a border town. She outfitted her cart with costume jewelry, notebooks, pens, and small toys. She became an effective saleswoman. She saved and invested in new merchandise, her business thrived and she supported her parents and two younger sisters. She married and had a child and began saving for its education. In 2008 she turned her cart into a stall and then also acquired the stall next door. She started a public phone business by charging people to use her cell phone. The authors write, "So if you ever cross from Thailand into Cambodia at Poipet, look for a shop on your left, halfway down the strip, where a teenage girl will call out to you, smile and try to sell you a souvenir cap. She'll laugh and claim she's giving you a special price, and she's so bubbly and appealing that she'll probably make the sale."<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., location 171-77. This entire story is extrapolated from the first chapter of Half the Sky.

That story, as horrific as it is, nonetheless illustrates how, with aid aimed at girls and women, stories of oppression can be turned into stories of opportunity.<sup>7</sup> But as the authors point out, “Less than 1 percent of U.S. foreign aid is specifically targeted to women and girls.”<sup>8</sup> And the central thesis of Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl Wudunn is this: when aid is aimed at women and girls, the world is transformed toward justice and opportunity. A chief economist of the World Bank, Lawrence Summers has written, “Investment in girls’ education may well be the highest-return investment available in the developing world... The question is not whether countries can afford this investment, but whether countries can afford not to educate more girls.”<sup>9</sup>

What do we do? our “little” church? We continue to get educated about these issues. Read Half the Sky or go to their web site. Watch the movie, available on Netflix, “Girl Rising.” Listen to Malala’s UN speech when she was just 16 years old. I dare you to do this and not get inspired by these girl’s stories. Advocate in your positions of power and influence to invest in the education and support of girls and women. Talk with your sons and counteract the cultural biases that seek to obliterate girls and women. Talk to your daughters and support their dreams and efforts. And when you witness injustice, take a stand against it. And of course, continue to be the church of Christ that you are, free from gender hatred and liberated from hatreds of all kinds. We condemn this gendercide. We oppose it. We work against it. And we create in our own community a place where girls grow up feeling affirmed, empowered and ready to enter the world with courage. We create a church that is authentic to Christ’s call of women.

In her epilogue to her book, Malala Yousafzai, wrote:

“Today I looked at myself in a mirror and thought for a second. Once I had asked God for one or two extra inches in height, but instead God made me as tall as the sky, so high that I could not measure myself. . . .By giving me this height to reach people, God has also given me great responsibilities. Peace in every home, every street, every village, every country— this is my dream. Education for every boy and every girl in the world. To sit down on a chair and read my books with all my friends at school is my right. To see each and every human being with a smile of happiness is my wish.”

Yousafzai, Malala (2013-10-08). *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* (Kindle Location 3518). Little, Brown and Company. Kindle Edition. ”

---

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, that is the subtitle of the book.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., location 123-24.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., location 213-20.

Yousafzai, Malala (2013-10-08). I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban (Kindle Locations 3514-3518). Little, Brown and Company. Kindle Edition.