

January 29, 2017

## *Abortion and the Gospel*

Psalm 139:13 – 16

This morning we are taking a break from our study through the gospel of Mark to focus in on one of the great moral issues of our day, abortion. I'll warn you right now that I am going to paint a pretty dark picture here at first, but I want to encourage you to hang in there because, as one pastor famously preached, 'It's Friday, but Sunday's coming!' Just as it is so important to know and own and feel the seriousness and despair of our sin before we can begin to embrace and feel and revel in the sweetness of our rescue by a merciful Savior, we need to know and own and feel the weight of this issue.

Before we begin though, I know that there are women in this room that have had an abortion, and men who have encouraged it, or even demanded it. And I know that a message on abortion is painful for you to hear. But the purpose of raising this issue is not to condemn you or make you miserable or hold you up as the example of the worst of sinners. Rather it is to remind you, to remind us, of the glories of the gospel that promise forgiveness and renewal and restoration and salvation through the death of the Son of God for sinners like you and me. It is to remind us of the love of God our Father to us even when we are at our worst. And to say to you that this is not the end, this is not the unforgiveable sin, but to acknowledge our sin and cast ourselves at our Savior's feet where the love that flowed from Calvary covers our sin and makes us right with God.

Last Sunday, January 22, was the 44th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the Supreme Court decision that launched a holocaust in America beside which every other act of genocide pales in comparison. In 44 years in this country alone, 58 million babies have been killed by abortion. Even the Rwandan genocide, which saw at least a million people killed, if left unchecked for 44 years would not approach this incredible statistic. To put it another way, if we held just one minute of silence for every victim of the Nazi Holocaust then we would be silent for eleven and a half years. If we gave each baby killed by abortion that minute of silence, we would be silent for one hundred and ten years. In 2015, the latest year for which there are reliable numbers, there were 906,000 babies who died by abortion. To put that in perspective, there are only 525,600 minutes in that same year. Almost two babies per minute died in 2015 as a result of an abortion.

But as Sam Storms said in that video, '*The death of one is a tragedy, the death of a million is a statistic*', it is hard to wrap our minds around the enormity of what we have done, as a culture, as a nation, as a people, to our unborn children. I struggle a lot with the idea that our world and particularly our country, has so devolved morally to the point where we feel compelled to even talk about abortion. It seems so obvious that killing babies is wrong, whatever you believe about God and morality. And yet we find ourselves in much the same place as Americans found themselves in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the great moral debate over slavery was raging. I don't believe anyone in this room today would argue a pro-slavery platform. Almost no one today thinks that slavery, any kind of slavery is the least bit morally defensible. And yet the debate back then was rabid, loud and violent.

There were people that argued that while they themselves would never own slaves, they could not tell other people that it was wrong for them to own slaves. And today we have people, even Christians who would argue that although they wouldn't choose abortion, they couldn't tell someone else that it was wrong for them to have one. We've moved the question out of the realm of morality and accountability to God, into the realm of politics and choice. It's my choice. That is the mantra of those who argue for abortion. It has almost nothing to do with the health of the woman. It is about autonomy and the desire to live life as I please.

In 2004, the Guttmacher Institute anonymously surveyed 1,209 post-abortive women from nine different abortion clinics across the country. Of the women surveyed, 957 provided a main reason for having an abortion. .5% were because the woman was raped. 3% were for fetal health issues, primarily Down syndrome. In fact, 90% of children diagnosed with Down syndrome are aborted in this country. 4% of the women cited personal health problems; another 4% said it would interfere with their education or career; 7% claimed they were not mature enough to raise a child; 8% did not want to be a single mother; 19% simply said they were done having children; 23% said they couldn't afford a baby; 25% said they were not ready for a child; and the other 6% marked 'other' as their reasons for choosing abortion.

The mindset of most people on the issue of abortion, for me was summed up in a Teen Vogue interview with Zoraima Pelaez, who is in her 20s and lives in Austin, Texas. She chose abortion because, "*I didn't want the course of my life to be altered because of something as common as pregnancy.*"<sup>1</sup> What that says to me is we have lost any sense of the sacredness of human life. Clearly, we have as a society gone down a path that says '**Human life in the womb is not sacred**'. But the larger issue is not merely the sanctity of life in the womb – but the sanctity of life in general. The issue is the sacredness of human life – all human life, not just the unborn. When a society begins to determine that some lives are not worth saving or being born, that is the moment they sow the seeds of their own destruction. When a society decides that human life is not sacred, the doors are opened for all sorts of evil to exist – and killing unborn children is merely a logical consequence of that world view.

**Human life is sacred.** It is sacred in a different way than everything else. Everything God has made has an element of sacredness, but human life is set apart in a way the rest of creation is not. We see this from the beginning of the Bible. God creates the heavens and the earth and everything in it and then He comes to man. Look at those familiar verses in Genesis 1 : *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."* Everything else He just creates and puts in place. But when it comes to man, something is different. Of all the created things, only man is blessed by God and given dominion over all the rest of the created world, only man is placed in a garden and given work to do, only man walks and talks with God as a friend. God is saying something about the sanctity, the set-apartness, of human life.

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1 <http://www.teenvogue.com/story/abortion-realize-reproductive-rights-autonomy>

In Genesis 9, after the great Flood, God renews His covenant with Noah and the rest of humanity saying, *"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. 2 The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. 3 Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you..."*. It is clear that man is in an altogether different category than everything else in creation. And God goes further in this covenant than He did in the beginning. Look down to verse 5. *And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. 6"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in His own image.*

What this says is that human life is given a higher value than any other kind of life. The word require means that God will demand an accounting for every drop of human blood shed not only by other humans, but by animals as well. And you might be saying 'What, if an animal kills a human being, God is going to hold those animals accountable? How does that work?' I don't know how that works, all I know is that this is what God said. What God is telling us is although He loves all His creation, humans are on a different level. Human life is sacred in a way that animal life is not. It is beyond ironic that many who protest and march for the rights of baby seals are the same ones who protest and march for the right to kill human babies. Baby humans are sacred in a way that baby seals are not. Human life is sacred.

**Human life is sacred because it is priceless.** That is, you can't put a price on it. – there is no exchange for it – there is nothing on earth comparable to human life. In fact the text in Genesis 9 tells us that you can't pay for human life in anything other than its own currency, which is a way of telling us human life is priceless in value. In his book, *The Applause of Heaven*, Max Lucado tells about a sweater that hangs in his closet. He says he seldom wears it — it's too small, the sleeves are too short, the shoulders too tight, some of the buttons are missing, the thread is frizzled. Logically, he says, he should throw out that sweater since he has no use for it and will never wear it again. But that sweater, for Max, has infinite value. It is unique, one of a kind, it is priceless. Each strand was chosen with care, each thread selected and woven with affection by his mother. You can't put a price on it.

**Human life is sacred because it belongs to God.** Psalm 139 reaffirms the truth that God is our Maker. *"For You formed my inward parts; You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."*<sup>2</sup> If you are the maker, the creator of something, you are its owner. We did not create ourselves. We don't own our lives. This strikes right at the heart of current thinking. This is at the bottom of all the arguments for abortion. "It's my body, I'll decide what happens'. But if we understand our life is not our own, it also has implications for how we treat others, in this case, the unborn babies. On the one hand, we are not our own, but on the other, we are accountable for our lives to the one who made it. Something is sacred if it is put into your hands but not your ownership. If someone gives you some money, and says, 'This is a gift' – you can do whatever you want with it. It's not sacred. But if they give it to you to invest for them – you are accountable – you cannot spend it any way you please. It is in your hands, but it isn't yours to do with whatever you want. It's sacred because it is in your hands, but not your ownership.

That is true not only for ourselves but for also for all those with whom we come into contact. It should inform the way we treat others, including unborn babies. Because God is our Maker, He holds us accountable to how we treat them. In the movie *'The Four Feathers'* the hero of the story lays dying in the Sahara desert. And some guy traveling through the desert finds him nearly dead. He picks him up and carries him to the nearest village where he recovers. When he is able to speak, he asked the traveler, *'Why did you save me'*? And the traveler responds, *'Because God put you in my way'*. In other words, he recognized his accountability to God, for how he treated this man. God puts people in our way every day, but I doubt that we are consciously aware that we are accountable for the way we treat them. We cannot act as if we own others by treating them however we wish – they are owned by someone else and we are accountable to the owner.

The most compelling reason human life is sacred is **because every human being is created in the image of God**. Rosaria Butterfield, once a champion of a woman's right to abortion, recently wrote about her moment of revelation. *"And then one day during worship, we sang Psalm 102 and it hit me between the eyes. Here was the line of my undoing: '**And peoples yet uncreated shall praise and magnify the Lord**'. I got it: abortion is not a right or an entitlement. Abortion steals praises from God by denying image-bearers the opportunity to live through and for Him. Abortion despises and attacks and destroys the image of God."*<sup>3</sup> From Genesis to Revelation, the testimony of Scripture is that we have been created in God's image. What that means is that divine glory rests on every human being. God has put His stamp on us. He's put His sign of ownership on us – **made in the image of God**.

Whenever you hurt another person, whenever you violate someone, you are not only assaulting that person, you are in a very real sense, assaulting God. In his book *A Body of Practical Divinity in a Series of Sermons on the Shorter Catechism*, Thomas Watson, the old Puritan preacher writes: *'It is a wrong offered to God's image. 'In the image of God made he man.'...It is tearing God's picture, and breaking in pieces the King of heaven's broad seal.'*<sup>4</sup> Whenever you hurt another human being, whether physically, spiritually, or emotionally; whenever you abuse them or despise them, you are tearing God's picture. In other words, an attack on another person is an attack on God. We are created in God's image.

What are the implications here for us, the church? What should the knowledge that life is sacred because it is priceless and belongs to God and made in His image compel us as followers of Jesus to do? What must we do in response to this issue of abortion? I think first of all we must not be silent about it. The church has for far too long relegated this issue to something personal or something political, or a topic too painful to talk about. Post-abortion counselor Kathy Rutledge said she once gave her testimony to a group of women at a megachurch in the South, and by the end, several women were "practically bawling." Yet, when Rutledge asked about doing a follow-up, the group's leader said, *"None of my women have had an abortion... and even if they did, they don't need to be speaking about it."*<sup>5</sup>

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3 <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/i-thought-planned-parenthood-protected-family-values>

4 Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity in a Series of Sermons on the Shorter Catechism*, p. 414

5 <http://www.jillstaneck.com/2015/02/secret-shame-abortion-church/>

Nancy Kreuzer, who serves as Chicago Regional Coordinator for *Silent No More*, said some pastors express fears that if they address abortion, it will “*open the floodgates,*” and they will be overwhelmed by wounded people. Others object because they say the topic is too political — or that discussing abortion might actually make it more acceptable. She goes on to say, “*Silence is a powerful weapon of the enemy. It’s in silence that the truth remains hidden and that lies flourish... lies that justify the killing of unborn children, lies that say abortion doesn’t hurt people... Our churches need to regularly communicate that they are safe places for women. While we cannot whitewash the sin of abortion, we also can’t ignore those who at one time have had abortions and are suffering. We must let them know that Jesus’ blood covers all sin, including theirs.*”<sup>6</sup>

We must learn how to communicate the love of God to those who have had abortions. A new study, commissioned by Care Net found that many women with unplanned pregnancies simply go silently from the church pew to the abortion clinic, convinced the church would gossip rather than help. More than 4 in 10 women who have had an abortion were churchgoers when they ended a pregnancy, but only 7 percent of women discussed their abortion decision with anyone at church. Three-fourths of women say the church had no influence on their decision to terminate a pregnancy.<sup>7</sup> As one of the pastors in the video we watched noted, the church in the first century had a reputation for pulling babies out of the city trash heap where they had been discarded because they were unwanted. It was the church in Rome that stood on the banks of the river Tiber to rescue the unwanted babies that were thrown into the water.

What if the church today had the reputation of being the safest place you could be when you had an unplanned pregnancy? What if people knew that the church would embrace and care not only for you but for the child you hadn't planned on having? James tells us “*Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*”<sup>8</sup> James uses orphans and widow here to cover a whole class of people the Bible talks about who are on the margins of society, representing the helpless, the weak, the oppressed in our cultures. The Lord through the prophet Jeremiah puts it like this: *Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place.*<sup>9</sup>

We thank God for organizations like CareNet and others that have taken up the gauntlet thrown down by the world in regards to abortion, but we cannot think that we the church should simply outsource our problems. The church needs to be in the thick of the fight for the sanctity of human life, doing all it can to rescue the perishing. That includes supporting and working with organizations dedicated to helping men and women who are looking for help with unplanned pregnancies like CareNet. Giving our time and talents and treasure, rearranging our lives to be involved. That includes thinking of ways we can welcome and care for and encourage and love men and women so they begin to see the church as a place of hope and healing and safety, instead of a place of shame and condemnation.

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6 <http://www.jillstaneck.com/2015/02/secret-shame-abortion-church/>

7 <https://www.care-net.org/churches-blog/new-survey-women-go-silently-from-church-to-abortion-clinic>

8 James 1:27 ESV

9 Jeremiah 22:3 ESV

Most of all, we must wrap gospel arms around those who have been deceived by the lies of abortion. I saw this tweet from the Gospel Coalition last week that said: 'Abortion is the evil reverse-image of the gospel. Instead of saying, "I'll die for you" it says, "You die for me'.<sup>10</sup> Jesus is the only hope for sinners like you and I. The law of the God who made us tells us we deserve to die for our sins, including abortion. But the gospel comes along and we hear Jesus say, "I died for all your sins, including abortion." We need to let the gospel wrap its sweet embrace around those who are dealing with the incredible guilt and remorse over having an abortion or facilitating an abortion, and remind them of God's incredible promise – *For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.*<sup>11</sup> And what God has thrown on the trash heap of memory, we dare not resurrect to ourselves.

If you are struggling this morning with the guilt and shame of abortion, I want to tell you first of all that this is a safe place to be. We understand that whatever the reason, it was an incredibly difficult decision to make and we understand your heartache. The church is not your judge, but we are a community dedicated to loving one another and bearing one another's burdens, no matter what they are. If you've had an abortion, you're not evil. You haven't committed the unforgiveable sin. You haven't fallen beyond the reach of God's love. Can you be forgiven? Yes, you can. Of course you can. What you need to hear this morning is the solid gospel assurance that there is forgiveness and mercy, restoration and renewal, at the foot of the cross.

More importantly, the question is are you forgiven right now? If you are in Christ, if you have embraced Him as Lord and Savior, then you have already been forgiven. Your abortion was a sin, but no sin is so big that the Lord Jesus cannot forgive it. He saved you knowing exactly what you did, what you are doing, and what you will do, and He still loves you. He loves you not because of who you are but because of who He is. Come to the place where your sins are rolled away. Come to the cross where Jesus took all our sins on Himself and paid the penalty for them once for all.

*Our gracious God and merciful Savior,*

*Forgive us for the many ways in which we have trampled Your Law and torn Your picture. Help us to reflect Your glory in this world and grant that we would be those who day after day are loving those whom You have made and see them as made in Your image. Let our hearts be broken for those who have been hurt and wounded by abortion, and make us instruments of grace to bring the healing power of the Son of God into their lives. Fill us with a passion to stand in the gap for those who have no voice and cannot stand for themselves, and spend our lives to rescue the perishing for Your glory and Your great Name's sake we pray in the precious, life-giving name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

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<sup>10</sup> <https://twitter.com/GospelApplied/status/823320993942962177>

<sup>11</sup> Jeremiah 31:34 ESV