

## “Choosing Life”

Psalm 139

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

There is no way we could do a series like this and NOT address an issue that has made major headlines this year. Truthfully, today’s subject in light of the Supreme Court’s reversal of Roe v. Wade this past June is one of the major reasons I decided to preach this *Chasing Sanity* series right now.

The title of today’s message is: **Choosing Life**

Now, this of course has to do with the Sanctity of life, and what we as Christians should believe about this. Unfortunately, this issue has become sort of a political football, and it has driven a wedge between political parties and has caused a lot of division especially here in the United States.

However, this issue really is not political at all...at least it shouldn’t be for people who view life and culture and what takes place in culture through the lens of scripture BECAUSE scripture is VERY clear in what it teaches about life – and this is what we are going to peel back and look at today.

Now, as we get going, I want you to know that I FEEL the weight and gravity of talking to a room full of people about a subject like the sanctity of life.

If statistics are correct – according to Lifeway Research in a study that was done in 2015, seven in ten women who have had an abortion identified themselves as Christian. Sixteen percent of all women interviewed that had abortions identified as evangelicals.

So, this is not just encompassing Catholics and Protestants these are people who would agree with not only the basic tenants of the faith, many would affirm what we are talking about in this series - the need of looking at the world through the lens of scripture.

I say all this to say, I am well-aware when speaking on a subject like this, there is a need for sensitivity and tenderness because there is NO question in a room this size combined with those watching online, I’m talking to people with whom this subject is:

- VERY personal...
- DEEPLY emotional...
- maybe even EXTREMELY painful...

Abortion may be in your past, and I want to promise you as we go through the message today, my desire is to handle this sermon in a way that is caring and kind...full of grace and love. It has been saturated in prayer and EVERY word that I am speaking today has been diligently thought through and prayed over – EVERY word.

I approach this message with the heart of a pastor who loves God, and fears him first and foremost, while at the same time loves his people enough to speak truth, and do it in a way that is filled with compassion, care and love. MORE than anything, I want to represent Jesus in a way that respects you and honors him, who according to (John 1:14) was “full of grace and truth.”

And so, with that, let’s begin and I want to say right at the outset here that we have two ministries present with us today that will be available in our foyer for you:

- One is CareNet Pregnancy Center. If you are pregnant and struggling in any way to find support and help, our church is here for you, but so too is this ministry.
- The other ministry is called H3 Helpline. I’ll share more about this toward the end of the sermon, but it is a ministry designed to help bring hope and healing to those who have had abortions or supported abortions in the past.

Now, I want to start by giving you three statements of fact that are derived from scripture – these are what I would call “no brainers” – meaning, they are true...it’s not in question, not even a little bit.

To read any of the Bible with an open mind, these are conclusions you would easily and readily come to. Here’s the first one, and I’m going to put these in the first person, just so it sticks!

### **1. God loves me**

This is a fact! Doesn’t matter what you’ve done...doesn’t matter how old you are...doesn’t matter whether or not you follow God, believe in God...NONE of this changes the fact that God loves you.

**John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world (put your name there), that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”**

**1 John 4:10 – “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”**

The sending of Jesus to die for our sins is God’s ultimate proof that he loves you.

**Rom. 5:8 – “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”**

If you’ve ever questioned God’s love...wondered about God’s love...doubted God’s love – look no further than the cross to see that God loves you infinitely.

Highlight this in your heart! He doesn’t just love mankind – make this personal...it’s why I put it in first person, say it to yourself and BELIEVE it – God loves me!

Now, it can be hard to wrap our minds around this and to really believe it at the heart level. How can a holy God love me even when my thoughts, actions, words, motives – sometimes they ALL point away from him?

Maybe you feel a little like the Puritan, Richard Baxter who wrote concerning John 3:16, and the usage of the word, “whoever” or “whosoever” to use the King James.

**Richard Baxter – “I thank God for that little phrase “whosoever” for had the Bible said, ‘If Richard Baxter would believe’, I would suppose that He were referring to some other Richard Baxter! But because he said whosoever believes, I know he is talking about me as well.”**

Make this personal today! Preach it to yourself until you believe it with your your WHOLE heart – (first-person) God LOVES me. The second statement of fact that is a given in scripture and that is:

## **2. God knows me**

This goes back to his sovereignty that we talked about last week Remember the words of Jesus?

**Matt. 10:29-30 – “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. (God knows everything about you and what’s going on in your life – even v. 30) <sup>30</sup> But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.”**

But it’s not just his sovereignty in that he is over all and in control of all, this hints at a different attribute of God – what we call his omniscience - God is all-knowing!

**1 John 3:20 – “for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.”**

So all-knowing is God...well, just listen to Psalm 139 which is a key passage of scripture as it relates to the sanctity of life. 7x in Psalm 139 the Hebrew word “yada” is used – it’s translated as the word “knows”.

**Psalm 139:1-12 – “O Lord, you have searched me and known me! <sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. <sup>3</sup> You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. <sup>4</sup> Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. <sup>5</sup> You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. <sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. <sup>7</sup> Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? <sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! <sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, <sup>10</sup> even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. <sup>11</sup> If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light**

**about me be night,”<sup>12</sup> even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.”**

God knows you better than you know yourself! The Bible says God knows the secret things of the heart (Acts 15:8, 1 John 3:20). The things NO ONE else in the world knows about you, God knows! The Bible says our “secret sins” - God knows them too!

**Psalm 90:8 – “You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.”**

Write it down. It’s clear from scripture. God knows YOU! Just think about this for a moment. It’s overwhelming for me to think that God knows me – really knows me AND still loves me. This is unreal to me! It makes me wonder how this is even possible!

Well, this is possible because of this third statement of fact we find in scripture, and that is:

### **3. God created me**

**Psalm 139:13-16 – “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.<sup>14</sup> I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. <sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. <sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.”**

We’ll unpack these verses here a bit more here in just a moment, but scripture is clear here...NOT vague in the least that God created us!

- He formed our “inward parts” (v. 13) – our inmost being...
- We are (v. 14-15) “fearfully and wonderfully” – some translations use the word “skillfully” made...
- In the New Testament, we’re described as God’s “handiwork” (Eph. 2:10)...

**Illus. Ladies that sew for Haiti** – care and concern...the skill!

These verses (Ps. 139) are meant to take us back to the Garden when God “created” man and breathed life into him. The word “made” there in (v. 15) is the exact same word used in the Genesis creation account.

Just as God “made” (produced, worked, fashioned, accomplished) ALL the works of creation (light and animals and plants and the heavens and the earth) so too did he make me and you.

We read in **Gen. 1:26-27** – “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.” <sup>27</sup> So God created (he formed, he shaped) **man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.**”

Now, this whole idea of the “image of God” is VERY important and what is said over the next 3-5 minutes will carry over into other topics we talk about in this Chasing Sanity series – especially the topics of Sexuality and Race.

The bible says here that human beings are created (shaped and formed) to use anthropomorphic language in the mind and heart and by the hands of God...get this: **JUST** as everything else was created - there is something different though about human beings that sets them apart from everything else created.

What is it? We call it the “Imago Dei”. Unlike anything else created, you and me...we were created in the image and likeness of God. This means we reflect God in some ways...we resemble him.

**Illus. Traits** – Just as some of you were passed down traits from your mom and your dad – physically you resemble them...may even share some of the same tendencies and likings. I got this chin from my dad (“Big chin, Jarrett Lynn”).

Our ability to think critically and rationally...to feel different emotions...to communicate intelligently...to act volitionally – this is all a part of being made in the image of God – and this separates us from the rest of creation!

Your dog can’t think critically, communicate intelligently...your cat certainly can’t! Don’t email me! Questions@cfbc.org! Ha!

Okay, I’ll give it to you that your pets can feel and can sort of communicate, but man is entirely different! If I give my dog a treat, rub his belly and let him chase squirrels, he’s having a good day. I worked with young singles for 10 years and whenever they went through a breakup and had their heart broken, a treat, rubbing their belly, chasing squirrels **NEVER** worked!

Why? Because man is different from animals. All other creation was made “according to their kind” the scripture says.

Only man was created in the image of God, and only to man does God give the unique authority and responsibility to rule over creation – again, this part of being made in the image of God – having responsibility and dominion.

What distinguishes us the **MOST** as it relates to being made in the image of God is when God makes us...he makes us a soul – this is the immaterial, immortal part of us that exists even when our physical body doesn’t! When we die, our soul lives on – somewhere.

As Christians, we believe that we will live in the presence of God after death forever and ever. For those that are not Christ followers, your soul – the YOU of YOU will continue to live on – it just won't be in the presence of God.

Listen, you are not a physical body with a soul, you are a soul with a physical body. And this is what it means to be created in the image of God.

Listen to Pastor **David Jeremiah** sum it up for us on what it means to be created in the image of God: **“So, what in the world does it mean that we have been created in the image of Almighty God? It means that we bear his character, his nature. We are made as a special reflection of who God is. We are constantly echoing his identity in a smaller way. When we work, for instance, it reflects God's work. When we love, it reflects how God loves us. And everything that we do in our lives as humans reflects some part of who God is. When we have dominion over the earth, we reflect God's dominion over the earth. And that is why we feel guilt, and why we feel love, why we feel genuine and complex emotions. As flawed as we are, we are the image and glory of the Father. And that's also why, until we get in sync with him, until we get connected with him, we can never, ever feel like we're the people we ought to be.”**

Now, I want you to put this all together. God loves me. God knows me. God created me. These are “no brainers” when you read the Bible and believe the Bible...it's not up for debate, not even a little bit.

These statements are ABSOLUTE in their certainty. Now, follow the train of thought. If they are true, and from a biblical standpoint they are, THEN that means you and me – we have VALUE.

Our lives are infinitely and eternally valuable simply because God loves us. God knows us. And God created us.

- It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks of us...
- It doesn't matter how we came into this world...
- It doesn't matter if our parents abandoned us or abused us or neglected us...
- It doesn't matter what we contribute or have the capacity to contribute...

When you look at another human being no matter how small or weak or how old...how seemingly insignificant or dirty and repugnant they may appear...how uneducated or uncivilized they are - you are looking at someone that has VALUE simply because they are a human that God has created, that he knows and that he loves.

And this is why, when I name the title of this message “Choosing Life”, while we will narrow our focus on the unborn for the rest of our time today, it's not limited to the unborn. We choose life EVERY time for EVERY person because EVERY life is precious to God.

**Illus. Forward project**– What I'm MOST excited about in this project is our special needs ministry – these families and children are precious to God – He created them...knows them...loves them! They aren't a mistake! They have GREAT VALUE and bring glory to God, and so we value them as well as image-bearers of God.

We'd do well to learn from Dr. Seuss and Horton Hears a Hoo...you know what I'm talking about? **"A person is a person no matter how small."** (SHOW IMAGE)

Now, here's where it gets interesting concerning the sanctity of life on behalf of the unborn. Biblically, ALL those statements of fact:

- God loves me.
- God knows me.
- God created me.

Biblically, all those statements are true NOT just for those outside the womb, but those statements are true for those INSIDE the womb. In fact, the Bible makes these statements specifically related to those INSIDE the womb.

**Jeremiah 1:5 – "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."**

**Isaiah 49:1 – "Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name."**

Let's go back to Psalm 139:13-16, and just read it one more time nice and slow. In the womb, God loves, knows and creates!

**Psalm 139:13-16 – "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.<sup>14</sup> I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made (one translation used the phrase "uniquely awesome". You are like a snowflake...we see it in our fingerprints – no one fingerprint is the same! We have a creative, master designer!). Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you (skeleton, bones, muscles), when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. (it's a reminder of the creation account...that we are like God, but we are not God – he's the Creator, we are the created)<sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them."**

We have value because we are created by God, known by God and loved by God – EVEN in the womb. And THIS is THE question when it comes to the sanctity of life regarding the unborn.

If what is in the womb is a person than that person has value because from a biblical worldview, they are loved, known and created by God. And listen I believe that scripture, science and the Spirit of God affirm that what is in the womb is not a clump of cells not simply an embryo or a fetus...it is a person MADE in the image of God.

Let's quickly just give a quick glance if you will at those three categories as it relates to the unborn. First, **Scripture.**

Scripture supports what is in the womb is a person. Let me nerd out on you for a moment and let's do a quick word study that will make this point. We've already looked at numerous passages of scripture today, the main one being Psalm 139, that what is being made in the womb is a person, but let's look at some more evidence.

The New Testament, written the Greek language uses more than one word for our English word, "Child". One is the word "brephos". Allow me to just for a minute take you on a little word study and let you see where this word is used.

Paul uses it in **2 Tim. 3:15** – **“and how from childhood (brephos) you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”**

Peter uses it in **1 Peter 2:2** – **“Like newborn infants (brephos), long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.”**

Luke used it earlier in his gospel **Luke 2:12** – **“And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby (brephos) wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”**

It's used two other times in Luke. **Luke 2:16** – **“And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby (brephos) lying in a manger.”**

It's used again in Luke 18:15 describing people who were bringing “infants” (brephos) to him so that he could lay his hands on them and bless them.

Now, in ALL of these cases the word “brephos” describes a baby that has already been born and is living outside of the womb of its mother! Hold that thought and turn to:

**Luke 1:41** – **“And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby (brephos) leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.”**

We see it again in: **Luke 1:44** – **“For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby (brephos) in my womb leaped for joy.”**

In both these cases the word used to describe a child INSIDE the womb is the same word used to describe a child OUTSIDE the womb! The whole of scripture supports that what is in the womb is a person.

Not just scripture though. **Science** supports this as well. Did you know a trained geneticist can distinguish between the DNA of an embryo and sperm and egg. But that same geneticist could not distinguish between the DNA of a developing embryo and a full-grown human being.

In other words, all the genetic makeup needed to define a human is present at conception. Listen to science:

- Just 18-22 days after conception a baby's heart begins to beat with its own blood.



- A baby's lungs are formed on day 26-27 after conception.
- On day 36 the baby's eyes develop their first color in the retina.
- On day 40 the baby makes her first reflex movements.
- On day 42 the baby develops nerve connections that will lead to a sense of smell.
- On day 44 electrical activity is detectable in the brain.
- At 8 weeks every organ is present.
- At 9 weeks, if prodded (because they can feel pain), the baby's eyelids and hands close.
- At 10 weeks, fingerprints begin to form.

Life begins at conception. Scripture supports this. Science supports this, and I believe the Holy Spirit will affirm this as fact if you ask him.

We know the Holy Spirit will NEVER contradict Holy Scripture. If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit lives in you, and if you are struggling with this, ask God to reveal his truth to you and then honestly look at the evidence and pray through what you read in scripture.

I believe you will come to the same conclusion – that what is in the womb is a person that has value because they are loved, known and created by God.

If this is true, and from a biblical standpoint, it is – then even the questions and debate we have in our culture about this issue, aren't as complex as they seem and can be answered...and that's what I want to conclude out time with today.

Let's tackle some of what I call "common questions from culture", and we'll hit them one at a time. Common Question from Culture:

### **1. As a mother, don't I have the right to control my body?**

Yes, but if what we said is true today, you have IN you another body – it's intimately attached to you for a period of time, but it's NOT a part of your body, like your arm or leg.

It's a separate person and if it's a person, it has value no matter how small AND I say this with tenderness and compassion – the rights to our body are not absolute. There is a reason drugs are illegal...prostitution in most states illegal. We don't have a right to our body if/when it's affecting another body.

Some people will say, "Well, you can't legislate morality." But we legislate morality all the time. We legislate against murder, cruelty, child abuse, incest, rape. We have antislavery laws and legislate civil rights. Projecting our moral rights on others is NOT wrong, but destroying the moral rights of others (others being in the womb) is wrong and this is why we defend the right to life.

It's not that a mother's life is not of extreme value...it is! But so too is the life of the person inside the womb of the mother.

## **2. What about in cases of rape, incest or when a mother's life is at risk?**

Again, I want to be careful here because I can't imagine the pain and emotion of experiencing something like that. I've got four daughters so you can believe I'm sensitive to it.

I do think it's helpful when we hear this in the news to put it in perspective. An abortion to save the life of a mother makes up less than 1% of all abortions – extremely rare.

If you were confronted with this moral dilemma, all I could tell you to do is seek wisdom from family and friends...listen to your Doctor. Get a second opinion if necessary, there are of course exceptions when a mother's life is at risk.

Abortions due to rape and incest make up 1% of all abortions. In the case of rape and incest, it's horrible and one case is too many. However, I think this argument is made sometimes like it's a smoking gun, but if we deal accurately with it, we're talking about 1% - so, what about that 1%?

If I fall where the Bible falls, everything we spoke of today (the baby is loved, known and created by God, therefore it has value), I have to fall on choosing life.

If a grown adult found out they were a product of rape or incest, we wouldn't take their life, and as we've mentioned today, the size of life doesn't matter when you are a person created in the image of God. Justice is not served to a victim of rape by taking the life of the unborn baby resulting from the rape – two moral wrongs, don't make a moral right.

This also doesn't take into account the trauma of having to live with that decision for the rest of their life.

I will say at this point, this is where the church should come in STRONG, and I believe we do. If you are here and find yourself in an unwanted pregnancy, I beg you to consider what we've talked about today and choose life.

Through our 624 Initiative, we can help cover costs, we can help match you with parents who would love to adopt. Since we introduced this ministry back in June, you church have given nearly \$70,000 and this is to help those who find themselves in a point of need.

We have with us today CareNet, our Pregnancy Center that can help you, they are in the foyer today. We also have with us H3 Helpline in the foyer. This is a ministry that helps those who have had an abortion begin the healing process.

And this ministry is led by men and women who have experienced an abortion (I think the numbers are 64% of women who get abortions say they felt strong pressure to do so!) So you may be here today and be a parent that encouraged it or a male that paid for it or a friend that supported it. This ministry is led by people who have been there and know what it is to experience hope and healing in Jesus. If you are here today and struggling because of a past decision, go by there.

I'm telling you Rom. 8:1 – “There is therefore now no condemnation...” is true before God today!

I hope you can hear Jesus speaking that over your life, and I hope you will see that in this church. We love you and are here for you! You will not get judgment here, you will get grace because that's what we've been given!

### **3. What about those who are poor, can't afford a child or will bring that child up in poverty and/or in harm's way?**

We hear this a lot being in an urban area. And I think in this, we have to determine if the “perceived solution” actually helps eliminate the problem. And I don't think it does. Poverty is a problem, no doubt. But killing the unborn isn't justifiable.

If this is the case, we could use this line of reasoning for any “problem” – eliminate what is causing it.

The better solution is for Christians to be the hands and feet of Jesus and keep showing people love, so that they hear us and trust us when we say we want to help. We say and mean it:

- Financially, we'll be there for you...
- Emotionally, we are going to support you...
- Spiritually, we are going to give you everything we have so that you never lose hope...

Let's promote life and adoption and let's open up our homes and hearts. Taking away life isn't the answer, choosing life is. This is NOT an easy message to prepare or preach. But, it is extremely important.

Those three statements of truth...they are true for the unborn, and they are true for you. Maybe you are here today and realizing for the very first time that:

- God loves you – with an eternal, everlasting love. He is full of steadfast love the scripture says.
- God knows you – better than you know yourself.
- God created you – and he has a plan for your life, if you will give your heart to him.

He would have come and died for you, if you were the only one living – you are that precious to him! You have that much value to our eternal God. All you have to do is believe and come to him by faith.

Will you pray with me?

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