

LESSONS FROM A WOMB TO WOMB WORSHIP SERVICE

A SERMON BASED ON LUKE 1:26-44

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It gives me great pleasure to be with you today, and especially today, as we turn our attention to the sanctity of human life.

In the last 12 months, my co-workers and I have traveled to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Vietnam, China, India, Romania, and Cuba. These countries suffer the highest rates of abortion, infanticide and gendercide (the intentional killing of girls) in the world. In all these places, we see Christian leaders turning their attention to the sanctity of human life.

They are asking four questions.

- 1. What does God say about human life, including life in the womb?*
- 2. What does God say about the shedding of innocent blood, including abortion?*
- 3. How do we bring the grace of the gospel to the guilt of abortion, so that people are forgiven and set free?*
- 4. What does God call us to do to stop the shedding of innocent blood and how have God's people done so from the midwives in Egypt to today?*

A few years ago, in China, the leader of the largest network of unregistered churches set out to train one million people in one month using these four questions. His desire was to see God's people...

TREASURE human life, including life in the womb.

REJECT abortion as the shedding of innocent blood.

PROCLAIM the cross as the shedding of innocent blood that can wash away even the guilt of shedding innocent blood.

STOP the shedding of innocent blood by standing up as an army of Good Samaritans —ready to rescue mothers and babies, as neighbors loving neighbors.

In Siboney, Cuba, five women, one of which is a doctor, banded together to end abortion in their small town. They call themselves, Soplo de Vida (Breath of Life). They rush to every home where there is a pregnancy related crisis. Using a hand-held ultrasound and an iPad, they provide her whole family a window to the womb, and promise help.

In 2017, the local hospital recorded 28 abortions. This past year, they recorded three.

Clearly, there are a few things so wondrously true that you can't help but want people to see them. You can't help but want them to see how this truth radiates out and transforms our thinking and choices, which in turn, impacts our family and neighbors, produces good works of justice and mercy and

eventually changes law and culture. The Christian view of human dignity, commonly called the sanctity of human life, is one of those truths.

At the same time, there are some things so wrong, so horrible even to look at, that you quickly look away for your own emotional protection. You don't want to hear or learn more. Or, with fear and trembling, you draw nearer to it, despite the discomfort, take a good hard look, and consider what you might do to stop it. That is the preeminent challenge of abortion. It is hard to talk about and we resist it.

My resolve to do something to stop it came in part through a phone call. My caller was only 16. Her emotions were so intense that she spoke haltingly, "If I don't... get an abortion... I'm going to kill myself." Before I could respond, she revealed her full anguish. "But I know... after my abortion... I... I just won't be able to live with what I've done... I will need to kill myself."

At that moment, I could sense the war that is all around us, between God and Satan, life and death, temptation and salvation.

To her, having a baby spelled the end of her life. True, her pregnancy was not a fatal disease, but it did present a mortal threat to her life as she had projected it. Abortion at that moment feels justified as a life-saving act.

The abortionist appears as the Savior and mimics his words, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you..." (Mt 11:28-29). Only his yoke is guilt, regret, shame, death.

At the same time, she recognized the humanity of her unborn child. What she was about to do was contrary to her own self-image. Like most women, she saw herself as a loving and caring person—more likely to risk her own life to save a child than to harm one. She was aborting her own faith and values and so, contemplated killing herself.

The battle before us then is to help people like my caller turn to the true Savior and to speak up for the unborn until their full humanity is acknowledged and the precious principle of equal rights for all justly includes them.

In the fight for life, God has given us weapons of the Spirit. 2 Cor 10:4-5 says, "we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ."

if the unborn are not human, then abortion is a matter of personal preference, like getting your hair cut or not. No special circumstances are needed to justify it. Conversely, if the unborn is a member of the human family, then killing him or her to benefit others is a grave moral injustice. Difficult circumstances do not justify it any more than they would justify killing a 2-year-old.

What then is the unborn? Today I want to answer this question according to the Bible.

You might say, "John, not many people are going to be persuaded simply because you point to the Bible."

Perhaps, but if the Bible in any way affirmed that the unborn was not yet human, you would hear it quoted often. So, what the Bible says is important.

Besides, I simply do not know how to tear down strongholds and defeat arguments rooted in defiance of God, apart from starting with the Word of God and letting him take our thoughts captive to his will.

So, what does the Bible say about the unborn? Does God see the unborn as human?

One passage that is especially helpful is Luke 1. Let's begin with 1:26-38...

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. 36 And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Verse 26, begins with "In the sixth month..." This is an important time-stamp. What does it mean? In the preceding passage, we learn that the angel, Gabriel, also appeared to Zachariah, who served as a priest in the temple in Jerusalem.

Gabriel brought good news. His wife, Elizabeth, had long prayed for relief from the pain of infertility. Now, even though she was beyond her child-bearing years, God was granting her a son. Verse 24 says, "After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden."

So, the meaning of, "in the sixth month" is "when Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy, the following things happened..."

If Elizabeth's pregnancy is surprising because she was too old to have a child, Mary's pregnancy is surprising because she was too young—too inexperienced. She was a virgin. Yet Gabriel tells her in verse 31, "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son."

What will she conceive? A son. A male human being. What will she give birth to? A son.

This is our first pointer that God sees conception as the beginning of human life. Jesus was not something that was conceived and only later became a son. He was, from the moment of conception, a son.

Last week, someone suggested to me that it may not work to take the language applied to Jesus and generalize. After all, he is special, the son of God. But the wonder of the incarnation is this: Jesus became like us in every way, only without sin.

But it doesn't matter. The language used to describe Mary's pregnancy is equally applied to Elizabeth's. Verse 36 says, "And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son..."

From God's perspective, you are conceived as a child, born as a child, grow up as one and remain your parents' child. It doesn't matter if you are in the womb or in a bed. Inside, outside, upside down, you are human at every stage.

Gen 4:1 uses the same language we find in Luke, "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain." The person, Cain, was conceived and later born.

We meet Job in the midst of such debilitating suffering that he laments his very existence. In lamenting that he was ever born, he traces the beginning of his life to the moment he was conceived. In Job 3:3 he cries, "Let the day perish on which I was born, and the night that said, 'A man is conceived.'"

The biblical perspective is that you are human right from conception.

Of course, science says the same thing. At conception you became a living, distinct and a whole human being. For example, the textbook, The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology, says, "Human development begins at fertilization, the process during which a male gamete... unites with a female gamete... to form a single cell called a zygote. This highly specialized, totipotent cell marks the beginning of each of us as a unique individual." [Moore & Persaud, 1998, p. 2.]

Good news likes to be shared. So, our story continues with Mary rushing off to visit Elizabeth where something truly wondrous occurs. Reading 1:39-44...

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, 40 and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, 42 and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

When Mary greets Elizabeth, the baby inside Elizabeth greets the baby inside Mary. A little womb to womb worship service breaks out, complete with "leaping for joy."

Now who is this child leaping? We will know him as John the Baptist.

What is John's calling in life? He was sent to proclaim the coming of the Lord and to call people to make themselves ready to receive him (see Luke 1:17). In Luke 3 we read of John beginning this publicly 30 years later. But on this day, at this moment, he is carrying out his mission privately, with his mother, from the womb.

I find it breathtaking. Gabriel foretold that John was to be filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb (1:15). It's possible that John the Baptist is one of the few people in history that were born-again before they were born. While this is surely rare, it is not unique. The writer of Psalm 71:6 says, "Upon you I have leaned from before my birth; you are he who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you."

But let's leave some things a mystery. What is revealed is John the Baptist, as an unborn baby, leaping for joy and proclaiming to his mother, "Mama, Mama, the Lord has come! He is right before you! Rejoice with me!" And his mother gets the message. She joins the worship service. Discerning that Mary is now pregnant she exclaims, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (1:42).

Verse 36 tells us John is six months old in the womb. How big is John at this point? Fetal science teaches us that he would be a little bigger than my hand.

How old is Jesus at this point?

Verse 26 confirms that Mary was in the city of Nazareth when Gabriel came to her. She was not pregnant, but rather was told, "You will [future tense] conceive a son." But by the time she arrives at Elizabeth's home, she is pregnant.

How much time passes between these two events?

There are two clues that these events are close together. First, verse 38 says that Mary went "with haste" to see Elizabeth. I think that means she went right away, soon after Gabriel departed, not weeks later. She was eager to get there. Our timeline provides a second clue, a helpful confirmation. Remember, Elizabeth is in her sixth month when our story begins. Luke 1:56-57 provides a second time-stamp. "And Mary remained with [Elizabeth] about three months and returned to her home. Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son."

Mary is with Elizabeth for the last three months of her pregnancy, showing us that her arrival also was in the sixth month.

As for distance, Mary traveled from Nazareth, to a town among the hills around Jerusalem. This represents a journey of approximately 115 KM or 70 miles and takes three to four days. However, since Samaria lay between them (a land avoided by many Jews) let's allow that she may have walked along the Jordan river road. In that case, her journey was more like a five to six day walk.

Even if we allow for seven to ten days, the conclusion is the same. When Elizabeth greets Mary, and John greets Jesus, Jesus is in the earliest days of embryonic development and no bigger than a period at the end of a sentence. Yet he is being worshiped by an unborn child, as fully God and fully human. Ponder that.

What flows from this story I share as part testimony and part admonition.

1. Worship with wonder.

My response to this womb to womb worship service is to join in. "Glory to God in the highest!" David ponders his creation and can't help but praise his Creator. Psalm 139:13-14...

*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.*

Let all your prolife work begin here and return here for refueling.

2. Weep over abortion.

Some things are worth weeping over. Abortion is one of those things. It is cutting into pieces what God is knitting together. As such, it is not just one issue among many issues that are equally as important. The shedding of innocent blood is such an abomination, a direct attack against God, that he demanded that Israel build cities of refuge right away. Why? "Lest innocent blood be shed" (Dt 19:10). As such, abortion is a preeminent injustice. Dr. Bernard Nathanson personally aborted over 75,000 babies. He called it "a

corruption raised to unimaginable powers of magnification” (“Pro-Choice1990,” New Dimensions, October 1990, 38). He wept over it.

My day of lamentation came when a woman in my church said, “I had an abortion one year ago. I prayed and said, ‘God, if what I am doing is wrong, please send someone to stop me.’”

These words stabbed me in the heart. I was her pastor one year earlier. God had sent someone to stop her—me. But my silence during those years left her vulnerable. It was pastoral malpractice. We both had to weep and repent; she for shedding innocent blood and me for not speaking up.

3. Speak up in defense of the innocent.

Since the unborn is fully human, the call of Proverbs 31:9 applies. “Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

Defenders of elective abortion must either deny science or deny the principle of equal rights. Speak up and help people see this.

Most people start out denying science. They reduce the unborn to a clump of cells or call it merely potential human life. There is no such thing. Scientifically, no one grows into being a human being. We only grow as a human being.

But the moment you accept the science of human development, you must deny the principle of equal rights. You must adopt Orwellian thinking: all humans are equal, but some are more equal than others.

For example, Mary Elizabeth Williams writes in defense of elective abortion, “Here’s the complicated reality in which we live: All life is not equal. That’s a difficult thing for liberals like me to talk about...A fetus can be a human life without having the same rights as the woman in whose body it resides...” (https://www.salon.com/2013/01/23/so_what_if_abortion_ends_life/).

Clearly, this woman senses the injustice. Her stronghold might crumble over pie and coffee with someone like you.

And finally, when you learn of someone, like my 16-year-old caller, who is in the grip of a pregnancy-related crisis, speak up. Just say four words, “Let me help you.”

Don’t worry about what follows. You’ll figure it out. Neighborly love is its own teacher. That’s why it’s an extraordinary weapon against the powers of death. Unleash it!

If you leave here today rejoicing in God your creator, grieving the reality of abortion and ready to boldly speak up in defense of the innocent, then I think you have done the first things well. Beyond this, God will lead. God bless.

John Ensor is president of [PassionLife](#), where he trains missionaries and indigenous Christian leaders in biblical bioethics and pregnancy crisis intervention in countries suffering the highest rates of abortion worldwide. His newest book is [Pregnancy Crisis Intervention: What to Do and Say When It Matters Most](#).