

“When Does Life Begin?”

Psalm 139:13-16

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“When Does Life Begin?”

Amen! So come running to Him and you’ll find grace and mercy. I’m thankful that we can now, because of Christ, come boldly into the very presence of our God and our Savior, our living Redeemer.

Take your Bibles and turn with me to Psalm 139. Psalm 139. As you’re finding it there, it is 522 if you’re using a pew Bible. I want to also encourage you to take a pen and get some paper and take some notes because we’re going to give you some scriptures today that will be critical to your understanding what you are about to hear. It will also be critical to your explaining to others who may have questions regarding when life begins. And this is our subject today... “When Does Life Begin?”

On our STRAIGHT UP series we have desperately attempted to deal with the most explicit and important questions of our times. Life issues. Really, questions of life and death. And we are communicating that there is only one opinion that really counts. Not my personal opinion, not legal opinion, not cultural opinion or my friend’s opinion but the only opinion that really matters is the opinion of Almighty God. He answers the great questions of life.

Frankly, I believe that the question of abortion and when life begins is really a symptom of a deeper, greater, and graver problem. And the problem is that so many in this nation, and, of course, around the world, but I’m speaking of America right now, So many in this country have abandoned the Christian--Judeo-Christian ethic which has been understood as a consensus of belief and behavior in our nation for nearly 200 years. And as a result of the abandoning of the Christian ethic that the Bible teaches, both Old

Testament and New Testament, it is as the Russian philosopher Dostoyevsky said, “If there is no God, than anything is possible.” Everything is up in the air. Nothing is nailed down, and what isn’t nailed down is coming loose.

And therefore, when you consider a question of ethics and behavior and choice, you’re dealing now with a culture that has either dismissed God or attempted to redefine Him. And out the culture of the sixties, a time of rebellion, in 1973, on the heels of that rebellion came Roe v. Wade, Supreme Court decision and since that fateful day, 45 millions babies have been aborted; their lives terminated! As a result of this kind of behavior and responsibility, or lack of responsibility, our culture is now a culture of death, who throw-away life. Because when there is no God or when there is no authority and no fear of God, then everything seems to be permissible.

And what is tragic to me is that many in the church today, many Christians have been caught up in cultural arguments. And in the debates and have been swayed by the enemy himself to accept the opinions of the world rather than the truth of God’s Word.

Paul said in Colossians 2:8: “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of this world and not according to Christ! He’s simply saying when you make your decisions don’t be caught up in what the world says because right and wrong, truth and error, good and bad is given to us by divine revelation. What is right, what is wrong, how we then shall live is determined by God Himself and He has communicated this by divine revelation in Christ and the Bible.

This is why Jesus said in John 17 in His High Priestly prayer. The prayer that He prayed before His cross, “sanctify them in Thy truth, Thy word is truth!” And when you

open God’s Word, this is not a book of man, this is the Book of God! God gave us this Book! And therefore it is His revelation to which we run for all information regarding really anything in life, because the Bible is not only inerrant, the Bible is sufficient for all matters of life and the practice of life.

Now I believe the most important issue facing America today is the value and the worth of every human life. The value of the immortal, eternal soul created by God! And a biblical world view, looking at this question through the eyes, through the lens of God’s Word will really settle the abortion question and the issue of when life begins.

Now the debate rages, of course. Perhaps you’ve had discussions with your friends regarding when life begins. You’ve listened to politicians talk about it and we’ve watched the media as the politicians and the philosophers of this world have engaged in this debate.

So some say life begins at birth when the baby is out of the womb. A well-known preacher of another generation believed that just as Adam was created by God and God breathed into him life, that life comes with breath, and therefore, the deduction is made with breath, out of the womb comes life. The only problem with that’s a scientific error of massive proportions because in fact, breath does not start outside of the womb, breath begins within the womb. Besides that, Adam was a special creation of God, not a birth! But the fact is there are some who believe that life begins at birth! And that is before birth, therefore, the baby is called a fetus or a product of conception.

Others say life begins when the fetus has grown and developed enough to live outside the womb. This is called viability. The problem with determining viability is that scientifically this is a moving target. There’s not a reliable standard as to when viability

takes place within the womb. Some would suggest between five and six months, and therefore believe that life begins at viability.

Others say life begins when a baby has a measurable brainwave. The argument goes something like this: Because the secession of life the end of life is determined by the ceasing of the brain function, the death of the brain, then it is reasonable to suggest, they say, that life begins when the brain is alive and is functional. And so a brainwave is observable at about six weeks after conception.

Still others claim life begins when the heartbeat can be measured. Thus the answer would be life begins three to four weeks after conception.

And then, of course, others say life begins at conception, that is, when the male and female cell unite, life begins.

So who is right? Well, science can certainly be helpful to us at this point because science is very clear on the fact that a unique DNA schedule is framed and formed when the life is formed at conception. And what happens at conception has never happened before; that is, what is produced at conception has never existed before and will never exist just like that again! And it is clear at conception that what is given, we believe by the hand of God, is not a vegetable. It's not broccoli or an animal but a living, breathing soul! A human being with personhood.

It's sad to hear abortion activists refuse to use the word baby for the unborn and instead use the word that is less intimidating like fetus or product of conception, as if the baby was an appendage of the mother, like an appendix or a gall bladder. So then the biological mother is given the ultimate choice (after all this is a part of her body) to continue or end the life of the innocent unborn! And it sounds so much better to say the

fetus was aborted or the product of conception was eliminated or terminated rather than to say the baby was killed! And yet the same mother who would call that which is within her a fetus one second after birth would say “That’s my baby... my baby.” Yet did you know the word *fetus* is Latin and it actually means child?

Life is a process that begins in the womb according to science. And each person begins at conception, is nourished in the womb, is delivered into the world and nurtured and grows into adulthood and even in cell structure beyond adulthood. This is the obvious and overwhelming evidence as seen in science.

But remember, we said scientific proof, legal proof, personal proof or opinion that doesn’t matter as compared to what God said. So ultimately for the followers of Christ what matters most is God’s opinion. And the Bible teaches us that life in the womb is formed and framed by God sovereignly and is therefore sacred to Him! Both born and unborn!

So in Psalm 139, verses 13 through 16 we see this clearly. “For you...” And by the way Psalm 139 is a powerful psalm regarding the omniscience of God, which means that God knows everything and that His presence, His omnipresence is everywhere, and His omnipotence His power to do anything. Psalm 139 is about the omniscience and the omnipresence and the omnipotence of Almighty God. And in the passage he refers to life in the present tense, He refers to life in the past tense, He refers to life in the future tense, and, yes, He refers as we are about to read, to life in prenatal tense.

¹³⁾For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. ¹⁴⁾I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. ¹⁵⁾ My frame (referring to the skeletal framework) was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶⁾Your eyes saw my unformed substance (which

could be translated embryo) ; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

And so there it is! If this was the only passage we had, this is all the evidence we need regarding when life begins. Life begins in the womb.

But this is not all the evidence we have. Consider Jesus. Our Savior stepped into humanity, stepped into personhood through the portals of a virgin’s womb not at His birth in Bethlehem, but rather at His conception announced at Nazareth. The Scripture records, Matthew 1:20:

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream (This is Joseph), saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Our Lord’s life and virgin birth is linked to this issue of when life began, and to Mary the same angel announce in Luke 1:31:

³¹ And behold³ you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

Now you may know that the New Testament was written in the Greek language. In fact it was written in a *Koine* language which means common Greek, and it was universally used in the ancient world. The first century world of Jesus and Paul and others that we meet in the Bible. And the Greek language is visual, it is vivid, and there are a number of words as in the English language that describe the same thing and you need to know, therefore, something of the language if you’re going to understand the Bible.

For example, the word *teknon*... t-e-k-n-o-n is the most commonly used word in the New Testament for child or infant. It’s used 98 times in the New Testament. *Teknon*. But there’s another word that is used, a more unique word, a more specific word that is

used only eight times in the New Testament and we’re going to look at all eight times quickly because it helps us answer the question as to when life begins.

This word that is used only eight times is *brethos*... b-r-e-t-h-o-s... *brethos*. That’s a English transliteration of the Greek word. So note how *brethos* is used in your New Testament.

Acts 7:19, speaking of the day of Moses: “*And He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants (or brethos), so that they would not be kept alive.*”

Brethos... infants.

Luke 18:15: “*Now they were even bringing their brethos to Him... their infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.*” This is that famous scene when the people were bringing their little infant children to Jesus and He embraced them. “For such is the kingdom of heaven.” *brethos*

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

1 Peter 2:2: “*Like newborn brethos... infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that it may... that by it you may grow up into salvation—*“

Luke 2:12: “*And this will be a sign for you: you will find a brethos... a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.*”

Luke 2:16: “*And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby... brethos lying in a manger.*”

Now what is common with these six references to *brethos* is that all of the *brethos*, the infants, the small child are outside the womb. They are living, breathing, functioning, and alive! But there are two more references and watch this:

Luke 1:41: “*And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the brethos (Elizabeth is the mother of John the Baptist) the baby... brethos leaped in her womb.*” Every woman in here is familiar with the leaping in the womb. But this baby leaped at the greeting of Mary the mother of Christ “and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Again in Luke 1:44: “*For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the brethos... the baby in my womb leaped for joy.*”

So in this case a *brethos* is not a baby living outside the womb but the *brethos* is a baby living inside the womb! And it is clear in the Scriptures therefore, that the baby, the *brethos* is not a product of conception or an appendix or an appendage to the mother, or a glob of tissue! But the *brethos*, the child given by God, living, breathing, and functioning!

The *brethos* outside of the womb are alive! The *brethos* inside of the womb are also just as alive as a baby in a playpen outside the womb! That’s the clear testimony of Scripture.

The argument of Scripture is absolutely and blatantly clear!

So if you accept abortion, you must reject the Bible, including disregarding or denying the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. You can’t have it both ways. If you believe the Bible is an authoritative word for every generation the, Word of God. Life begins at conception! This is explicit in the Bible.

As a matter of fact the Bible tells us that life begins not in the womb but in eternity in the heart and mind of a sovereign God who knew our names and our time and birth date and death date before we were born. We read that in Psalm 139, about our lives being written in His Book.

And then in Jeremiah 1, verses 4 to 5: *“Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Before I formed you in the womb... 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.”*

There was a prophet alive in the womb of his mother but known of God before time began! So Jeremiah in chapter 20 and verse 17 spoke of his mother who did not kill him in the womb. *“... so my mother would have been my grave...”* How tragic that the safest place... what should be the safest place on earth... a mother’s womb... has become a grave to millions of innocent *brethos*, babies.

Ephesians 1:4: *“...even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love”*

So because life is sacred, because life begins in the heart and mind of God and conception in the womb begins this process of life, the Christian cannot remain silent as these little ones, these innocent ones are terrorized and murdered.

Listen to the Scripture again, Proverbs 24[:11]: *“Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, “Behold, we did not know this,...”* How can we turn our heads? How can we say... In light of the information that we have today how can we say, *“...we did not know this? does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?”*

To take an innocent life, born or unborn, is to break the sixth commandment which says “Thou shall not murder.” It is a serious offense in the law of God.

Exodus 21[:22-23]: *“When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman’s husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life...”* The Bible speaks of those whose hands shed innocent blood.

Proverbs 6[:16-17]: *“These six things, yea, seven that the Lord hate...”* and right at the heart of that are *“hands that shed innocent blood.”*

But some object, “Oh, it’s my body! It’s my choice! What about me!” The Bible teaches us that our bodies do not belong to ourselves, but our bodies belong to God! Blood-

bought! Purchased at the cross! First Corinthians 6[:19-20] *“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ...”* You cannot say, “It’s my body!” *“for the body is the temple of God... “you were bought with a price. So glorify God with your body.”* The church must take a stand!

About 1983-84 I was the pastor of the First Baptist Church of West Palm Beach and I was standing one evening at our outdoor amphitheater on the Intercoastal of the Atlantic Ocean preaching on this subject. And as I was preaching and hammering home these truths, the Holy Spirit began to work on me and I heard God say to me. You say, “Was it out loud?” No, it was louder than that! But God said to me as I was speaking, “Jack, what are you going to do about that?” And I didn’t know, but I promised God then and there that evening during the invitation this preacher made a decision that we would not just say something, but we would do something.

I found out just a few weeks later about a little church up in Georgia that was sponsoring and running a pregnancy center wherein women and girls with unwanted pregnancies could come in and get counsel and choose life for their babies. They could get an alternative. Because at that day the counsel that most were getting, of course, was “get an abortion if you don’t want the child.” These were the freewheeling eighties.

So we started in our church a pregnancy center. The First Baptist Church of West Palm Beach started the pregnancy center, and God gave us a great response initially; and opposition came. To the degree that our little pregnancy center was called into account on the floor of the US House of Representatives. It seems that there was a study being done as to whether or not churches could do this without forfeiting their tax-exempt status

because, you see, we were mingling into morality and political opinion and so on. So a few of our deacons in our church got a little nervous about that. People start talking about your tax-exempt status this was new and this was risky. So in our deacons meeting one evening a couple of these guys, good guys, but they began to question whether or not we ought to be doing this.

And a big tall, about six-five high school principle at Leonard High School in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida stood up. His name is Luke Thornton, great man! He'd seen some of the devastation in his own high school in this wrong choice that girls were making, and he said, “I don't know about all this...” And the discussion was taking place regarding tax-exempt status and so on. “But I do know this and believe this: If Jesus were walking among us today, He would be involved in this ministry!” End of discussion. End of debate. Our deacons fully and completely affirmed what we were doing and God blessed and still blesses that pregnancy center.

And so when we came to Dallas in 1989 one of the first things we wanted to do was establish a Prestonwood Pregnancy Center which we did in 1991. Now just listen to what's happened at our pregnancy center. We've seen 43,000 clients, we have witnessed over 1600 professions of faith, men, women, families, and people coming to personal faith in Jesus Christ through the ministry and the mission of the pregnancy center. There has been over 2500 known baby births. Many more because we don't know where or what happened to all the clients, but 2500. Just in 2009 which are our latest complete statistics, 3419 client visits. Pregnancy tests -1826. Sonograms-1023. When a mother and a father look at the baby on a sonogram it changes a person's opinion as to life and when

it begins; 171 salvations in that one year, and the birth of 268 beautiful babies who now are living a life in the Son ,in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Of the 3500 women, nearly, that walk into our pregnancy center, 74 percent of these change their view on life and abortion as a result of this ministry. And 83 percent changed after seeing the sonogram of “my baby”. I have always believed that it is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness! The Scripture says [Romans 12:21]: *“Overcome evil with good.”*

Now there is much that could be done and should be done regarding political activism on this issue, our votes should be heard. I love what Jerry Falwell said years ago. I’ve never forgotten it. Regarding political candidates and this issue of abortion. Falwell, like only Falwell could say it, said, “I wouldn’t vote a man in as dogcatcher who was prochoice, because he’d probably kill the dogs!” How’s that for straight up? How’s that for straight up?

But regardless of your vote, let your voice be heard! Take a stand among your friends and people you love, in your own family! You know, it’s amazing how many Baptist people are prolife until their daughters get pregnant! May God help us to be consistent and compassionate and to care for the life of the unborn! To preserve and protect the life of the unborn. That’s what we’re doing at the Prestonwood Pregnancy Center. That’s what you’re supporting. And I thank God for that.

We need to hear the call of Moses as it challenges us today.[Deuteronomy 30:19] *“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I set before you life and death; blessing and curse; therefore choose life... therefore choose life that you and your offspring may live.”*

So what do you believe about when life begins, because that’s the result of your decision and how you decide regarding the future of your baby will be determined about your answer to that question. Just so you’ll know the statistics. I’m wrapping up here, but just so you’ll know the statistic: only one percent of abortions are due to rape or incest. Six percent are due to health problems of the mother or the child, the other 93 percent are for reasons such as the baby being unwanted or ill-timed or inconvenient.

Mother Teresa said this: “Only God can decide life and death. That is why abortion is such a terrible sin. You’re not only killing life but putting self before God. Yet people decide who has to live and who has to die. They want to make themselves Almighty God! They want to take the power of God in their own hands! The way to say, “I can do without God; I can decide!” That is the most devilish thing a human can do.”

America needs to repent of our sin of this holocaust. Morality is the strength of this nation. Our military is great and strong and we respect it and celebrate it, but the strength of this country is not primarily in our military, but in our morality! [Proverbs 14:34] *“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.”* So let this be a cry, a call, a plea for morality!

Sexual immorality and sex outside of marriage has become now the rule, not the exception! May God help us to repent of our sin. [2 Chronicles 7:14] *“If My people who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”* May God help us to pray!

We've already lost a generation. Did you know that more babies have been aborted, far more babies have been aborted, 4 times the babies have been aborted in America since 1973 than all the men and women killed in combat since the Revolutionary War and all the American wars that have followed! Thank God for those who have perished in battle but put it in perspective!

9-1-1 thrust the world into a battle against terrorism, America into this battle. Over 3000 Americans perished on that fateful day. We give them love and respect and we remember their families this day! But over 4000 babies are aborted every day in America! Put that in perspective. “Choose life, not death!”

Can you imagine what has happened? In Genesis [25:23] *“Two nations are in your womb” God said, “and two peoples from within shall be divided. The one shall be stronger than the other. Two nations are in your womb... the nation is in the womb!”* Can you imagine just the sheer loss of potential and economic power due to the 45 million that have been lost? We're hearing now that this current young generation of Americans may be the first generation to make less, to have a lesser lifestyle than their parents before them. And in great part this can be attributed to the loss of life in this generation! And the sheer monetary power that is now lost! May God help us. The future of our nation is at stake and a culture of life must become a reality.

Now to those who have aborted babies: it is a sin, but not an unpardonable sin. Run to the mercy seat. Find grace. The hurt and the grief and guilt you feel, and nobody much talks about the regrets and the hurt and the guilt and the trauma that people live with for a lifetime, but that hurt and that pain and that guilt and remorse, regret that you

feel, Jesus bore that all on the cross for you. He died for your sin. The Good News is that you can be set free and fully forgiven.

Listen to the beautiful words of Paul in Romans 8, verse 1: *“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* He opens up His life to you. He died for you; He lives for you. His love is eternal. And if you will confess your sin and repent of your sin and receive Christ... [Isaiah 1:18] *“Come now, let us reason together. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool!”*

“There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel’s vein. And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.” Take the plunge! Come to Christ and His cross. The one who said to a woman taken in the very act of adultery, [John 8:11] *“Neither do I condemn you: go and sin no more!”*

If you are considering an abortion, please, for God’s sake, don’t do it. Don’t make a decision that will take an innocent life and a decision that you will regret for the rest of your days! And don’t say, “Well, my baby is unwanted. It’s an inconvenience...” when there are thousands of couples, multitudes of couples right now who are praying to adopt a child! Don’t do it! Make the compassionate choice; make the courageous choice. Choose life! There is hope, there is help, there is healing for you and you can find grace enough in times of need.

I’m going to ask that every head be bowed and every eye closed. Strong message, straight up as I can get it. Jesus came in grace and truth. I hope you hear truth; I hope you hear grace today. I hope you know that you’re in a grace place. While we are holding high the standards of God which we are called to do in the Scripture... while the

prophetic voice of the church must be heard in this generation, we also extend the arms of the love of God to you this day who will come to Him and find fully and freely deliverance and healing and change forever.

So wherever you are in this room listening to me, watching, radio and television. Right now, where you are, pray and receive Christ as your Savior. Take the plunge; run to the mercy seat. Pray a prayer like this:

Lord Jesus, I know I've sinned and broken Your commandments. Thank You for dying for me, for Your love which bore my sins on the cross. I believe You rose again.

The Bible says [Romans 10:9]: *“If we confess with our mouths the Lord Jesus, and believe in our hearts that God has raised Him from the dead, we will be saved.”* So believe in your heart, and confess Him now by calling upon Him.

Lord Jesus, you've said whoever calls upon Your name will be saved. I call upon Your name. Come into my life and cleanse me and change me. Make me Your child. May I live for You in the power of Your Spirit, a brand new life until You come for me.

We're going to sing a hymn of decision, a song of choice. I set before you life and death; choose life. I set before you blessing and cursing; choose the blessing and the favor and the grace of God.

Lord Jesus, move across this room by Your Spirit and bring to Yourself all who are believing and receiving You. We thank You for Your word that is so clear and for Your message of life and good news that is so compassionate and loving, to broken and hurting people, people who have made bad choices in their lives. All of us, Lord, have sinned and broken Your commandments. We are all sinners in need of Your grace so we come to You and we find in You hope and help and strength forever to go on. In Jesus' name. Amen