

“The Character of a Pro-Life God”

Psalm 139

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Sunday Evening Sermon

#50890

Well, it's a privilege to be here with you, church family, tonight. And it is so special for me because this really is where the ministry of Lifeline began, was at Briarwood Presbyterian Church with the vision of a ministry of life. And I want to tell you, Church, that even as you talk about a life team and as you talk about a curriculum of life, it is so important and you have no idea the way that you will sow seeds today and the ripple effect that that will have for eternity.

So, I as Rob said, my name is Herbie Newell and I'm the president of Lifeline Children's Services, and I can tell you that as a young one, I never dreamed that I would be leading a pro-life evangelical adoption foster care ministry. But there's a young lady over here that actually did dream that one day she would be a part of a pro-life ministry, and that's my wife, Ashley. We were at Samford University in a Bible study, and I remember one of the first times that I was very interested in her, and I asked her, “Hey, what is your dream? What do you want to do with your life?” And she said, “I don't know exactly, but I know I want to do something to make a difference in the lives of women that are going through unplanned pregnancies. I want to make a difference for the gospel in their lives.” And so here now, here we are as a family leading the Ministry of Lifeline Children's Services. She, out of college, went straight to Sav-A-Life Crisis Pregnancy center that was born out of Briarwood Presbyterian Church. And I would be remiss if I did not thank the Lord for the way that He used Jean and Wales Goble and their faithfulness to sow the ministry of Sav-A-Life out of this church and the ministry of Lifeline out of this church.

And so even before we open up God's Word, I just want to praise the Lord for what he has done, church. The first family that Lifeline served came right here out of Briarwood Presbyterian Church to minister to a woman and to minister to a man. That young man has gone around the world taking the gospel of Jesus Christ, and he's back in Birmingham as a successful businessman. But more than that, one of the things that I don't know if you ever imagined, but today there are believers in Colombia and India and China who are adopting and caring for life in their own context, in their own countries, because of the faithfulness of what the Lord has done.

So beloved, as we open up God's Word and we remember the sanctity of life. I want to remind you that one of the biggest things that we can do is show the presence of God, the glory of God, the Gospel of God, and the sanctity of life to those that are right in front of us. We have no idea what the ripple effect will be of our faithfulness, and so we want to be faithful.

So this morning or tonight, as we open up God's Word, I want us to look at Psalm 139. There's really no better place to go to look at how we anchor our pro-life conviction, but also what that really means for us to serve a pro-life God, a God that loves us, a God that cares for us, a God that seeks after us. This is one of the many passages that we use to justify the Biblical pro-life conviction, and it proves that being pro-life is not a political statement. I was in D.C. last week and I had the opportunity to go to Capitol Hill and meet with several Senators and several Congressmen, and I'll tell you right now that a lot of times those

Senators, those Congressmen use their pro-life convictions in order to win elections. Being pro-life is not a political statement. No, what drives our advocacy, what drives our praise and glory for life is rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the truth that humanity bears the marks of our Creator.

And so, as we'll see in Psalm 139, God's character is what ultimately brings us great comfort. It's His character that helps us to go each and every day. And so even before we look at Psalm 139, I want to ask you a question that you might ask yourself. Does God's character bring you comfort or conviction? You see as an image bearer of Almighty God I hope that when we see God's character expressed through the Psalm of David in Psalm 139, we will ultimately see comfort in a God who is a jealous God. We are comforted because we know that true joy and fulfillment comes only in a life that's ultimately submitted to Him. Our God is a holy God, a consuming fire. This is what the author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 12:28-29. "Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe for our God is a consuming fire." We find great hope in the truth that we know that while this world will not last forever, we have a God that will bring justice. And so beloved tonight, if your confidence is rooted in the God of the Bible, if your confidence in your salvation is found in Christ Jesus, then you have a confidence that cannot be shaken because we have a God that is a consuming fire and our God is sovereign. And so when things seem out of control, we have confidence that nothing is outside of His loving just and kind control. Matthew 10:28-31 says this, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him, who can destroy both soul and body in hell. And are not two sparrows sold for a penny and not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father? But even the hairs on your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, you are more precious than the sparrows." If you are a child of God, then the character of God should bring you great joy.

And this leads us to our passage in Psalm 139, where we see the pro-life character of our God. David the psalmist said starting in verse 1 of Psalm 139, "Oh Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, oh Lord, you know it all together. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high; I cannot attain it. Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me and Your right hand shall guide me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me and the light about me be night,' even the darkness is not dark to You; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. 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. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. 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. How precious to me are your thoughts, oh God! How vast is the sum of them! If I could count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with You. Oh that You would slay the wicked, oh God! Oh men of blood, depart from me! They speak against you with malicious intent; Your enemies take your name in vain. Do I not hate those who hate you, oh Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies. Search me, oh God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if

there is any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" This is the word of our Lord. Let's pray.

Father God, thank You so much for your Word, inspired by the pen of the psalmist, David. Oh Lord, to know that You made us, You formed us, You created us. And even before we worship you, Lord, we come before You in all reverence. God, You are so good and You are so gracious. Use these words to illuminate our conviction. Lord, use these words to fan into flame our conviction for the sanctity of life. And may the conviction of the sanctity of life ultimately lead us to go to all nations and to preach the good news of the glorious grace and Gospel of Christ Jesus. Lord, use this text to guide us in Christ's name we pray, amen.

Five results that I want us to see tonight of God's pro-life character, and the first is that we are completely known by God. We are completely known by God. David says, "Oh Lord, you have searched me and you have known me." You see, God is like a spy. He's intimately acquainted with us. He seeks us out and He knows this better than anyone. He knows our thoughts before we think them. He knows our words before we speak them. He knows our actions before we move. God knows his people. He knows our propensity for weakness. He knows our strength. He knows our emotions and He knows our fears. Beloved, you are intimately and fully known by God.

And so in a congregation this size, in a room this size tonight, I know that there may be many that feel feelings of inadequacy or loneliness. Many may be plagued with fears of the future or are worried about facing the unknown. Maybe some are grieved to the point of no return because of the loss of a loved one or a health diagnosis. But beloved, this word tonight is for you. We serve a pro-life God who knows us, who intimately knows us. He knows our thoughts, He knows our hurt, He knows our sorrow, He knows our pain. When Jesus ministered to Mary and Martha, we are told in John's gospel, in John 11:35 that Jesus wept. And while this may be the shortest verse in the Bible and the easiest one to wow your friends with your scripture memory, it also tells us that Jesus felt. He had pain. He knew his image bearers. He was deeply moved by what moved them. So beloved, if you're going through something tonight, know that we have a God that made you, created you, sustains you, seeks you out. He knows you and He holds you with His mighty right hand. John goes on.... John 11:5 tells us "Now, Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." Therefore, Jesus weeps. John tells us that "When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews had come with her weeping, he was deeply moved and greatly troubled." Jesus was deeply moved and greatly troubled. Beloved, let your joy be renewed in this truth, that the Almighty God knows you completely. You can't hide from Him. The psalmist says, "You have searched me and you have known me."

Imagine Adam and Eve after that first sin in Genesis chapter 3, trying to hide from God. And the truth of the matter is, so many times we try to hide from our Creator as well. And what are we really like? We're like toddlers playing hide and go seek. Have you ever played hide and go seek with a toddler? You know, they get in the middle of the room and they hide their face because they think if they can't see you, you can't see them. And that's exactly what we're like, trying to hide from God. We're like a toddler playing hide and go seek. You cannot hide from God. There is no privacy. You are hemmed in by the knowledge of God. He already knows you. He knows every propensity for weakness. And yet he asked you to come. I John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Matthew 11:28 "Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will [what?] I will give you rest." Beloved, let the knowledge of God be a source of comfort tonight, but also a source of accountability. He is our great God. And David says in verse 6, "Such knowledge, [such knowledge] that I am completely known

by God, it is too wonderful for me, it is too high. I cannot attain it.” We are completely known by God.

But the second point that I want us to see from Psalm 139 is the presence of God is inescapable. God is present with us everywhere we go. David says in verse 7, “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence?” It’s a rhetorical question, and the answer is nowhere. Many times we think God leaves us or deserts us. We may even cry out in our anger, oh God, where are you? And the answer is always, I’m right here and never left you and never forsake you. I’m right here. God is faithful to guide us and to hold us and to cover us. So, beloved, don’t run away from God, but surrender to Him. Well, Paul says at the church at Rome, in Romans chapter 8, verses 35-39, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, ‘for Your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither life nor death, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor heights, nor debts, nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.” Beloved, where would you want to be that would be away from the presence of God? God’s presence is good. God’s presence is holy. He is our creator, sustainer, and sovereign. God is love. God is goodness and God is purity. And His presence comforts His people. At times the greatest comfort that we can offer vulnerable women walking through unexpected, unwanted pregnancies is our presence. We are mimicking God’s love when we’re present for the vulnerable, the orphan, the vulnerable woman, the vulnerable family. When a loved one goes through something hard and someone loses a friend, when someone loses a husband, a spouse, a son, or daughter, what do we do? We go to them. We bring them our presence. Why? Because that’s what God does for us. He gives us His presence. And so we need to be present for the vulnerable woman. We need to be present for the vulnerable child. We need to be present for the vulnerable family. Our God is an ever-present help in times of our greatest trouble.

So we’re completely known by God, the presence of God is inescapable, but the third result of God’s pro-life character...we are intimately and intricately created by God, unique and abundantly special. And this brings us to three glorious truths, and the first is that men and women are uniquely and wonderfully made by God. No matter what culture says, men and women are uniquely and wonderfully made by God. Psalm 139, verse 13, “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.” In Genesis 1 and 2, the common refrain that we see when God was creating the world was what? God saw it and it was good. But then we see in Genesis 2, the first time in the creation account, that it says something wasn’t stellar, it wasn’t quite good, it was missing something. Genesis chapter 2, verse 18 says, “The Lord God said, ‘[It is good that man...] It is not good that man should be alone. I will make a helper fit for him.’” You see, all creation was good, but man was incomplete without woman. Beloved, if we’re going to be defenders of lives and if we’re going to speak out for the image bearers of God, then we must not only realize that every life has worth, but we must also realize it’s a pro-life issue that God made us men and women. You see, God’s gift to humanity was a family where a husband and wife help one another in the pursuit of the glory of God. The family is God’s institution for human flourishing. When we operate in loving harmony with a husband nourishing his wife and a wife surrendering to Christ through her husband, we’re showing the world that we are truly pro-life. When we have healthy, God-fearing families, we see a picture of health which shows the justice of the kingdom of the world. Our healthy families create confident children and strong churches and so beloved, don’t miss it, being

pro-life means being pro-woman, it means being pro-marriage, and it means being pro-family. And so may our marriages and our families begin to reflect the Lord in such a way that single pregnant women desire what we have and they see the love of the kingdom displayed for them in the way that we love each other.

In Genesis 3, Satan's attack was first and foremost a vertical attack between God and man. But don't miss it, it was secondarily a horizontal attack, an attack between a man and a woman. Satan attacks the nuclear family because our enemy hates human flourishing. It's because of sin that we have orphans and vulnerable children, and it's through our families that we ultimately see women and children and vulnerable families reconciled to a holy God. Beloved, don't miss it. We have an enemy and he hates families. He hates marriage, and he hates human flourishing. And so, when we stand up for the sanctity of life and we stand up for the dignity of our neighbor, we're going at war against our enemy. But don't forget, we're not going to war alone, we're going to war with a God that knows us intimately and His presence never leaves us. So let's fight the battle of life because it is a gospel fight.

But this leads us to the second truth, and that is humanity was created for God. Genesis 1:1 begins "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." And then John tells us in his gospel, John chapter 1, verse 14, "And the Word became flesh, and it dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." And then Paul tells the church at Corinth in chapter 6 verse 13, "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord and the Lord for the body." And then we see in I Corinthians chapter 10, verse 31, "So whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do it all for the glory of the Lord." You see, Beloved, we were made to glorify God. We were bought with a price, and we are not our own. And so we defend life and we stand up for the sanctity of life because the sanctity of life is not a choice, it's a gift from Almighty God. Life is not an inconvenience, life is a gift of God. May we never treat life that's living or life in the womb as an inconvenience. That's why we stand up for every life, no matter the syndrome, no matter the diagnosis, no matter what it is, because we believe and we know that all life is made to glorify our God. And when we act in such a way of showing a true impression of what life is about, to bring God glory, it's irresistible.

It's like going to Costco on a Saturday. They give you those little samples and they don't intend for you to make lunch at Costco, no, they want you to buy the sample. They want you to go buy the box that'll feed you for five years. That's what they want you to do. And then next thing you know, your bill's so big because you bought all the samples. They want to put a taste on your lips so that you buy the big box. Brothers and sisters, we've been called to stand up for the sanctity of life and to do it in such a way that we show a sample of the goodness of God and we put a taste on the lips of those who are perishing so that they want to feast at his banqueting table where His banner over us is love.

But that brings us to the third glorious truth, and that is God supernaturally designed us to be satisfied in Him and Him alone. You see, we cannot be satisfied in anything else but the Lord. The Church of Corinth most mirrors our modern-day culture. It was a place of art and pleasure and romance and sensual pleasure. But Paul continues to exhort the church that the things of the flesh and the pleasures of this world, they will never truly fulfill, they will never bring peace, they will never bring satisfaction. And he says in I Corinthians 6:13, "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord and the Lord for the body." The truth is, beloved, we are far too easily pleased. I love what C.S. Lewis says in his book, *The Weight of Glory*. He says, "Our desires are not too strong, but too weak. We are halfhearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is

offered us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by an offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased.” Beloved, we can only find satisfaction in the God of Jacob. We can only find satisfaction in a relationship with Christ Jesus. Beloved, life in the womb is precious, and life outside the womb is special. And we must never mark life as inconvenient, but it is a life that will bring glory to the Lord.

I know that I am getting ahead of my skis right now, and Bruce will never allow me to speak at Briarwood again, but one of the greatest things that I have ever witnessed was a baptism, a believer's baptism, of a young man who was deaf since birth, adopted from China. And I remember Kai Christenberry signing his testimony as he was being baptized in the baptistry. And I remember I was there and he started to sign and his mom, Kim, would translate what he was saying. And during his testimony, he said, “The Lord is good. He allowed me to be adopted from China when really no one should have wanted me because I was deaf. However, my goal and my aim is to take this gospel that I’ve received back to China, to those who cannot hear so that they can hear once and for all the glory of the Gospel of Christ Jesus.” Beloved, out of the mouths of babes and infants, He has ordained praise. We never look at life as an inconvenience, but we know that all life will bring glory to our great God. And so we defend life no matter the disability or the syndrome attached to it. And we ascribe life value because it's knit together intricately and wonderfully by our great Creator. He is the one that gives life, and He is the one that takes life away. Blessed be the name of the Lord, our God.

So, we are completely known by God, the presence of God is inescapable, we are intricately and intimately created by God, unique and abundantly special, and the fourth result of God's pro-life character is that these truths spur us to defend life and to promote God's justice. You see, God's enemies become our enemies when our allegiance is to God. We begin to cry out for God, for the justice of God. And because of His supremacy and character, we serve Him and we surrender to Him because there is no God like our God. David says it like this in verse 17, “How precious to me are your thoughts, oh God, how vast is the sum of them?” Are we seeking the Lord and His plans for our lives and our families or are we looking to culture to find meaning? I pray that we would be like David, and we would be mesmerized by the thoughts of God. One of the ways that we can begin to practically care for orphans and vulnerable children is by praying for them. You see the Author and the Creator of the universe knit them together in their mother's womb, and He knit us together as well and He is our Father. And so I ask that we begin to think about how we can pray for those around the world, that we can pray for the orphan, we can pray for the vulnerable child. You see, it's not enough today to speak out for life to be born, but we must be there when life is born and wrap our arms around that mom and wrap our arms around that child to show life and love and dignity. You see, when we really believe that God is the author of life, that God made life and intricately formed it together, then it changes the way we serve, it changes the way we act, it changes our marching orders. This is what Paul says of the church at Philippi in Philippians 2:2-8 and this becomes our epitaph as well. As we realize that God is pro-life, Paul says, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourself. Look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though He was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but He emptied himself by taking on the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” You see, being pro-life is not just about eliminating abortion. Being pro-life means putting our families into action and to live out our passion by guarding the Imago

Dei. Being pro-life means that we defend life in such a way as to display an accurate view of the glory of God. We despise injustice, because it's an affront to our God. And one of the ways that we begin to glorify God is by performing the works of the justice of the Kingdom of our marvelous Father, caring for women that are going through unplanned pregnancies. We can adopt and foster children. We can work to reconcile broken families, and we can use our lives to show the vulnerable the goodness and the glory of God.

One of the ministries that LifeLine has had a great privilege of getting to participate in is a ministry that we call Families Count. And Families Count is simply this, it's realizing that there are kids today in Birmingham and around the world, about 420,000 kids in the United States that have been removed from their families. And what we believe is the church is the best place to teach those families appropriate parenting skills, to show them the hope of the gospel and to give them mentor and relationship that one day could see those kids placed back in their home. And this last year of 2023, we had 261 families put back together. These families count. And I want to tell you right now, it's not because the curriculum is good, it's okay. It's not because the venues are good. Venues are okay. It's because the Church of Jesus Christ is standing in the gap. And when the Church of Jesus Christ stands in the gap, we have a Father that goes before us and He is a reconciling, redemptive Father, and He is redeeming and reconciling lives. Oh, when we realize the goodness and the majesty of a pro-life God, how we begin to participate in God's justice.

But the fifth and final result of God's pro-life character, as we wholeheartedly know, is that all work without the gospel is futile. David, even before Jesus came on the scene, understood the promises of God. Look again at verse 24 of Psalm 139, it says, "And if there be any grievous way in me then lead me in the way everlasting." David knew there was something far greater than this earthly life. He had an inkling of the goodness of God and beloved, there is no hope except in the God of Jacob. Justice that we do must never be divorced from Gospel proclamation. Our homes, our neighborhoods, our pocketbooks and our influence will never make everlasting change in the hearts and the lives of the fatherless and the vulnerable. But the gospel, the gospel that we celebrate, the gospel that brings us here as brothers and sisters in Christ, that is what will bring everlasting hope and victory. In II Corinthians chapter 6, verses 1-2 Paul says this, he says, "Working together with Him then we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says, 'In a favorable time I listened to you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." We live in a day of great grace and patience. God is withholding His judgment and offering sweet mercy for our rebellious hearts. But this day of salvation, beloved, will not last forever, but it will only last for the time our Father has appointed. And so we go. And there's an urgency to preach the gospel. There's an urgency to care for the vulnerable. There's an urgency to speak up and to speak out for the sanctity of life made in the image of our God. So let us hearken to the message to preach the good news of the kingdom to those who are perishing. And as our Father's children, we know we've been given a task, we've been given a great commission. You see the truth of the matter, beloved, the reason that we stand up for the sanctity of life is because we were a life. We were a life that God stood up for. There's nothing in and of us to be found, but God in His great mercy redeemed us, not because of our works, lest we should boast. He redeemed us because of his grace and mercy. And it creates a response in us to show the love of Christ, to show the goodness of Christ to a world that is hurting, to those that are vulnerable, to those that are perishing. But let us not do it in a sense of justice, this divorced from gospel proclamation. But may we always know that we go and we serve and we do and we do the ministries of justice in order to make the Gospel of Christ Jesus known.

So I hope tonight that you are comforted by the character of God. I pray that as we see the character of a pro-life God, it would shape our convictions. It would give us hope and ultimately it would be a model for our lives. Let's pray.

Father God, I thank You for Your Word that is true and never returns void. Father, I thank You that You are good and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. And Lord as your people, called according to Your name and Your purpose, would you use us for your glory as we speak out and speak up for the sanctity of life? And I pray that we would not recognize the sanctity of life as a political or judicial or legislative issue, but we would see it as a gospel, Biblical issue. I pray that it would not be something we look at and talk about only once a year in January, but it would permeate what we do each and every day, that as we go into the marketplace and as we go out, that we would see those made in Your image and Father, that we would stand up for the vulnerable, that we would speak out for the hurting, that we would care for the pregnant mom, and Lord, that we would wrap around vulnerable children with our families and our lives and our care and our time. Lord, I thank You for this church. I pray that You would continue to be with this church and strengthen this church and grow this church in Your grace and Your mercy and Your justice day by day. It's in your great Name that we pray, the name of Jesus, amen.