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**Transcribed Message
January 22, 2023
Psalm 139**

Message: In Celebration of Life

My friend, for the first time in years we come to a Sanctity of Human Life Sunday in which abortion is not the law of the land. That is a remarkable, remarkable thing. For 50 years since Roe vs. Wade, that law has governed the affairs of our country and now that has changed. There is much to be done, but this is a transformative time in which we find ourselves. It was in 1973, I happened to be a sophomore in college when that ruling came down from the Supreme Court. Bonnie and I graduated from seminary in 1980. For the past 43 years, both here and in the church we served in Kansas, every Sanctity of Human Life Sunday we have joined with churches and believers all across this land in calling ourselves to a greater understanding of the issues involved in calling our country to a repentance and a turning away from this terrible evil. Here we are today. Now we are remembering and we're reflecting and we're praying and we have been looking forward to this day for all of these years. I would say of myself it was a prayer of more like I believe, help me in my unbelief, because I must say as I did this summer when this ruling came down, as much as I wanted for this day to come, I honestly wasn't sure that it would ever come. But here it is in our lifetime.

Here's what I want to do in our time this morning. I want us to take a look on the Sanctity of Human Life Sunday where we are right now, and then I want us to also look at what really compels us as followers of Christ to be committed to this matter of the sanctity and sacredness of life. As we do that, we do it with this understanding. How incredibly amazing is it that this God of immensity that we can't even begin to comprehend, this God Who is so great and so immense and so awesome, so far beyond our human understanding and capacity, and yet He is intimately interested in every one of us. He knows every one of us so well. He is involved in each of our lives. The reason He is involved is because He is the author. He is the author of all of life and it's all precious to Him.

So where are we today on this first Sunday in Sanctity of Human Life in 50 years in which there is not a federal law that allows for abortion all across our land? I would say this. None of these comments are driven by a politic or by an ideology other than what I believe is the truth of the word of God and the truth of Scripture. The first one is simply this. We still have a president who is committed to abortion without limits. That's simply the reality. Our president said on the day that Roe was overturned that it is a sad day in the United States of America. Our president said on that day that this is not the final word, and he immediately called on Congress to pass legislation to protect abortion as a federal law. He went on to say that it is a tragic error in their ruling by a rogue Supreme Court. So we still have a president at this point in time who is committed to abortion without limits.

Secondly, we still have about 263, and that number could move a little bit one way or the other, senators and representatives who are committed to abortion without limit. I think that's simply on the legislation that has come before them even in the recent weeks in which every one of them has had an opportunity to stand up for life. 263 of them chose not to do that, maybe for a variety of reasons which could be discussed at another point, but the reality is they voted in some cases, like in the House of Representatives, to not try and save the life of a child who had undergone abortion and survived. Here is what a couple of our representative said in light of that. Jerry Nadler of New York made this comment. He said: "This bill is a bad bill. It directs and mandates certain medical care that may not be appropriate." So a baby survives an attempted abortion and is struggling to stay alive and Rep. Nadler says it directs and mandates certain medical care that may not be appropriate. I don't even know how you respond to that kind of thinking. I have no idea where that kind of thinking comes from.

Not to be outdone, Rep. Jan Schakowsky said, "This legislation requires immediately taking a struggling baby to a hospital. That hospital could be hours away and it could be detrimental to the life of that baby." How in the world? Under what other circumstance in all of human life would you say about a human who had undergone some traumatic situation, in what circumstance would you ever say the hospital might be too far away? It could be detrimental to them to try to get them there. There is even, as I indicated in my prayer, a spiritual battle that is raging. There is no other way you

can possibly explain otherwise intelligent, smart people making comments like this. And yet that is the day in which we find ourselves.

Thirdly, we still have seven states that allow for and encourage abortion without limits. That number is probably higher than that but there are seven states and the District of Columbia that simply have abortion without limit. That number is really closer to about 25 when you consider that there are numerous states that have moved since the overturn of Roe to make abortion more accessible, to open up with greater liberality their laws. So there are more than seven that are encouraging this. But certainly, that is a number that speaks of where some of these states are in response to the Roe situation. For instance, in Illinois the governor just recently signed legislation and he made this comment with regard to protecting women who come to Illinois for an abortion. He and the legislature agreed that: "We're going to be a state," he said, "in which reproductive care is understood as being healthcare." Well, of course it is... for everybody but the baby. They are doing all that they can to make sure that women who need an abortion find it accessible in the state of Illinois. They are going to make sure that they're protected from any other legal ramifications from the state in which they originated.

Next, we still have a media and entertainment and corporate industry that largely supports abortion without limits. You see that across the scope. You saw that when the Hobbs ruling came down and Roe was overturned. Major corporations immediately got out in front of the story and said we're going to make sure that the women who work for us are going to have access to abortions. We will pay their way to go to states where they can get that. So many corporations got out in front of this and even said they would help make that happen. Certainly within the media, we know that there is a slant towards pro-abortion ideology and perspective. In fact, Andrea Mitchell, who is an MSNBC host, actually interrupted a reporter who was on her program because he used the words "pro-life". Here's how the interchange went. He was giving his report and she interrupted him and said, "Garrett, Garrett, let me just interrupt and say that pro-life is a term that an entire group wants us to use, but that's not an accurate description." Imagine interrupting a reporter to interject your opinion about the fact that he is calling a pro-life group by the very words that they call themselves and correcting him. Of course,

she wanted it to be understood that it is not pro-life, it's anti-choice. They don't want women to have a choice in these matters.

Here's what we still have. Here's what we do still have. We still have the same life-changing gospel to share. In the midst of all of this, the victory being what it is on the level that it is, the battle still is there before us. But we have one thing that has not changed through all of it and that is the unchanging power of the gospel. That is always the centerpiece of our message. That's always what we want to be reminding people of and telling people about.

We don't have to let the past define us. Paul said of his journey, I'm going to forget what's behind me. I'm going to press on to what is ahead. I say again, as I have said every Sunday that we have done this together, I say again to anyone who has had an abortion, God's gospel, God's word, God's truth comes to you and it says forget what is behind you and press on to what is ahead. God has taken that sin and that which you have acknowledged by way of that in your life and He's buried it in the depths of the deepest sea. I would say to those of you that have encouraged someone to have an abortion the very same thing. This same gospel embraces you, comes to you, encourages you to forget that which is behind and press on to what is ahead. God has taken that and He has taken it as far as the east is from the west. We step into this wonderful mercy of God, the grace of God, this message of hope and healing that the gospel brings to us every day.

Here is the other thing that hasn't changed. The other thing that hasn't changed is the Bible's absolute clarity regarding God's involvement in the life of the pre-born. Let's look at that for a moment. There is not a single verse that we can turn to that says life begins at conception. It would be nice if we could just say this is the passage, the book, the verse that simply says life begins at conception. We don't have a verse that says that. We don't have a verse in which the Bible says abortion is the taking of human life. We can't turn to a book, a passage, a chapter, a verse that says that. But there are so many ways in which the Bible speaks the truth into our life by way of implication. Those implications are clear and are far-reaching. We read them earlier in Job 10 when Job talk about God doing that formative work in the womb of his mother. Jeremiah saying God, You knew me before I was even in my mother's womb. How remarkable is

that? God knew you before you were even conceived. That's what Jeremiah the prophet said. That's startling. It's amazing. It's transformative.

Psalms 139 stands as the pinnacle of all of this. Let's open our Bibles. Let's turn to Psalm 139 and let's look at this amazing passage again that speaks of God's involvement in our lives, this picture of God's involvement in every pre-born person's life. It starts off with David wondering about the unborn and the knowledge of God towards us. Look at the first six verses: "O 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, O Lord, You know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it." God simply knows us better than we know ourselves. That's what the psalmist says. David says God knows us better than we know ourselves. That is the vastness of His knowledge for us.

Who knows you the best? Who knows you the best? Well, if you're still living at home, you probably say your parents know you the best. They see you the most. They interact with you and maybe talk with you the most. Your parents might very well be that. If you're married, you probably say your spouse, your husband or wife, knows you the best. We often joke and talk about the fact that once you've been married for a certain period of time, you know what the other person is thinking, or if they are going to say something before they say it. You wives know that if you're shopping with your husband at Cabela's and he begins to move towards the bass boats, you can simply say don't even think about it because you know in his mind what he's thinking. You husbands, your wife is headed for Hobby Lobby ... well, if she's headed to Hobby Lobby, there's really not much you can say. That is just a reality. Just yield it. Give it up. God is saying His knowledge of us is completely on a different level. It is on a completely different level. God knows us. He knows our conscious life. He knows us when we're up and we're going. He knows, as David says, in our subconscious life. Just think about that. He says I know your thoughts before you think them. What do you say to that? Other than whoa, or wow. Amazing. He knows our thoughts before we think

them. He certainly knows our words before we say them. We think we know what somebody else is thinking, but God knows what everybody is thinking.

With that secondly, it speaks to our supreme value. Our supreme value and importance isn't found in ourselves. We can forget focusing on ourselves. That's what is so off in our culture and time. We are so self-centered. We're so narcissistic. Our value isn't found in ourselves. It isn't found in how we look. It isn't found in how we talk or what we've accomplished. Our value and importance is in being known by God. In a day of depersonalization, in a day when you just long to call customer service and speak to a human person, in a day when we read increasingly that there's more artificial intelligence coming our way, in that day here is God saying to us you are of value and importance to Me, not because of anything you've done, but because of who I've made you to be, because I know you.

I love the way Paul says in Galatians chapter 4 and in that 9th verse he says, "But now that you have come to know God." Okay, that's an incredible statement. But now that you have come to know God. But then he switches it up and he says, "But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God." Now that, my friends, is weighty. That, my friends, is value. That is what is important. It's not what you and I know. It's that God knows us. That is what gives us great value. That's what we talked about the sanctity of human life, the sacredness of human life. Because God says He knows all about us.

Notice secondly, the unborn and God's presence. The unborn and God's presence. Let's pick up at verse 7 and read to verse 12: "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 hold 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 bright as the day, for darkness is as light with You."

Here, there, everywhere. God is here, He's there, He's everywhere. I don't take verse 7 as David expressing some kind of wish or inner desire that he wants to get away from God, that he is trying to find a hiding place from God. I think rather it just

flows out this sense of reverence, out of this sense of awe, out of the sense of the majesty of God. He's just making a declaration. It's not that he wants to be away from God's presence. He's just saying it's not possible. If I go to the highest heaven, God, You are there. If I go to the lowest hell, God is there. That's right. Our destiny, as different as they could be between heaven and hell, there is one common denominator. You're still in the presence of God in vastly different ways, in vastly different experiences. But you cannot escape the presence of God because God is omnipresent. Everywhere is in the presence of God. There is no conceivable state of being, David said, in which you could separate yourself from God's presence and knowledge. It is simply not possible. In the womb, before the womb, in the womb as you're being formed, God is with you. He knows you. He's watching over you. you're born, you're going through life, He is with you. He knows you at death, and after is to be in His presence. All of life. The whole of life is lived in the presence of God.

Then David comes in this next section to this climactic description of the unborn and the work of God. In verses that are transcendent even in the light of Scripture, what we see in this next set of verses is simply without description matched anywhere else in Scripture. Look what he says beginning at 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. 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."

Look at what he says here. He speaks first of all of the design of the body, the very design of the body. Verse 13 he talks about the formation that is happening. It's the word that's used of the potter. We remember in Romans 8 God describes Himself as the potter and we're the lump of clay. He's got the right to do with us as this lump of clay in any way in anything He wants. David draws on that same analogy. God is the potter. We're the clay. He is the One who forms. We're being formed. He speaks to the fact that we're knit. It's the language of a weaver. If you were to translate this literally, it would be God unrolls you. God unrolls you. He's forming you. He's knitting you. He unrolls you like a tapestry in the womb of your mother. The growth of a baby is not

haphazard or accidental. There is a divine and creative work there and God is superintending all of that for His glory.

Notice secondly the progress. The progress in forming the body, and it is never an impersonal collection of cells. One of the main arguments of those who were promoters of abortion is my body, my choice. They say that what's happening in that woman's body is just simply a part of her body and therefore it's her choice to do as she wants with that. That is a tragic misunderstanding of what's happening in that miracle. I'm going to read from an article and by the way you can pick this up in the foyer on the table back there. There are a number of clear biological facts and legal precedents that easily refute the claim that the embryo or the fetus is simply part of the mother's body. Consider the following: An individual's body parts all share the same genetic code. If the unborn child were actually a part of the mother's body, the unborn cells would have the same genetic code as the cells of the mother. This is of course not the case. Every cell of the unborn's body is genetically distinct from every cell in the mother's body. Though it's possible for someone to have a transplanted organ that does not share the same genetic code as the rest of their body, that transplanted organ does match the genetic code of the original donor. The same cannot be said of an unborn child.

Secondly, human embryos are not independently generated by the woman. According to the former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, he said, "We should not view the unborn baby as an extension of the woman's body because it did not originate only from the woman. The baby does not exist without the man's seed."

Number three, in many cases the blood type of the unborn child is different than the blood type of the mother. Since one body cannot function with two different blood types, this is clearly not the mother's blood. It's a different person.

Number four, it is possible for a fetus to die while the mother lives, and it's possible for the mother to die while the baby lives. This could not be true if the mother and child were simply one person. When the embryo implants in the lining of the uterus, it emits a chemical substance which weakens the woman's immune system within the uterus so that this tiny foreign body is not rejected by the woman's body. Were this tiny embryo simply part of the woman's body, there would be no need to locally disable the woman's immunity.

Miracle after miracle after miracle that happens. Sir Albert Lily, father of fetology, made this observation many years ago, "Physiologically we must accept that the conceptus is in a very large measure in charge of the pregnancy. Biologically at no stage can we subscribe to the view that the baby is a mere appendage of the mother." There are a lot of mothers in here who would say amen. I never felt like I was in control during my pregnancy.

Then this last one. Dr. Peter Nathanielsz of Cornell University concurs. He says, "The unborn's brain sends a message to his own pituitary gland, which in turn stimulates the adrenal cortex to secrete a hormone which stimulates the mother's uterus to contract. A woman goes into labor, not because her body is ready to surrender the unborn child, but because the unborn child is ready to leave her body." That is part of the miracle of what God does. There are a thousand other things like that that just speak of the miraculous work that God is doing.

Notice then secondly, it's language that is vivid and pictorial. He speaks in verse 15 of the frame of this baby being formed. He is talking about the skeletal structure. There are something like 315 bones in a newborn that then are formed and fused into about 206 in an older child's body. That happens so that that baby can make its way and be born into the world. But all of these things are just the work of God. Augustine said it this way: "Men and women go abroad to wonder at the heights of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, and they pass by themselves without wonder."

It is intricately woven like an intricate embroidery. It is the very thing that we read in Ecclesiastes chapter 11 verse 5: "As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything." There are so many different places in Scripture that just speak to this issue of what God is doing, the handiwork of God, that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Just as the heavens declare the glory of God, the psalmist says, so too does God's formative work in the womb. I read just this past week Naomi Osaka, the the one number one rated women's tennis player in the world, is not taking part in the Australian Open. And you know why? She told everybody on Twitter why she wasn't taking part this year. She posted a picture of a sonogram of a baby that was being

formed within her womb. Her declaration to the world was can't wait to get back on the court, but here's a little life update for 2023. Now the world congratulates her and is in awe. Here's the number one women's tennis player in the world announcing here's a sonogram picture of a baby that is being formed inside her. At the same time, we live with the realities that we discussed earlier and the nonsense that representatives and senators and elected people make about an issue in which it almost seems you couldn't be any more ill-informed about the reality of what is happening in the formation of these lives.

Then finally, this unformed substance that he speaks of. A word is used only here in all the Bible. Only here. This unformed substance. You look it up in a Hebrew lexicon and it's the word "embryo". The reality of what God is doing. God, Your eyes saw me. When you go through Psalm 139 verses 1 to 24, there are 47 personal pronouns. Amazing. 47 personal pronouns in these first 24 verses of the psalm. In Genesis 25:22, when Rebecca was pregnant with Jacob and Esau, the writer of Scripture says that the children struggled in her womb. The children struggled in her womb. It is the same Hebrew word that is used for children who are born and living outside the womb. Same exact word, remember in Luke chapter 1 verse 41 when Mary and Elizabeth met each other. Both of them were pregnant. Elizabeth with John the Baptist, Mary with Jesus. Remember what happened when John the Baptist in her womb heard the voice of Mary? It said that the baby leapt in her womb. The Greek word for children. It's used in the same passage in which Jesus says don't keep the children from coming to me.

I say to you again the testimony of Scripture and the witness of Scripture is clear. This immense, amazing, incomprehensible God that we worship and serve is interested in you and interested in me. He knows us. He knows all about us. Every one of our days are numbered. He knows all of our thoughts even before we think them, our words before we say them. God is the author of all of life. It is all precious to Him.

So what do we take away? Life is sacred because God created it, because God superintends it from conception to birth to death. We need to care. We need to care about life as much as God does. I want to just remind you of practical ways here at Covenant that you can step into this truth. God is the creator of all life and God cares. There's a table in the foyer this morning. Tonya will be there. She's with Crossroads

Clinic. Crossroads Clinic is one of our partners. Go back there and talk to Tonya and find out what's happening at the clinic. It's a place where the gospel is shared every time somebody walks through those doors. They experience and they're embraced by the love of Christ. Write them out a check. Find out how you can support them monthly. Find out what their needs might be, how you can help practically mothers who are already in some cases having to struggle with life and now finding out they're pregnant, how can we as a church facilitate and help Crossroads Clinic and other ministries like that all across our city.

We have the Care Portal. Susan Willingham does an incredible job with the Care Portal. You ask what's the Care Portal? It's a way that we minister and help families in need, oftentimes single moms. Not always but often. And it is just practical ways that we say your life matters. We care about you. We want to help lift a little bit of the burden. Send an email to the church office or Caitlin about knowing more about the Care Portal, about how to help families in need.

The Rise ministry right here among us where we help care for families with special needs children. Maybe that's on your heart. Talk to our children's ministry people. Talk to Kristie about what would it be like to step in and be a helping hand in the Rise ministry and valuing life at every way and every level that we can.

Special Emphasis Sunday this year we're looking forward to probably in March and hopefully, Lord willing, to bring in a speaker to talk about fostering and adoption. There is no more vital way for us as a church to step into affirming life than to being a body of believers that is supportive of and seeking ways to help grow the fostering ministry and the adoption needs within our city, state, and nation. So those are practical ways. I'm sure there are many others that you can discuss in your community groups. Let's together rally around this gospel because that's the life-giving matter of it all.

It is this gospel that says you and I were born into this world separated from God because of sin. That's why we're grappling with the issues that we are. That's why there's a spiritual battle going on. God created and man messed it up. God is seeking to bring about His redemptive work in our lives again. So we bring this glorious gospel that says I have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But praise God, Jesus came. He died on the cross for my sin and for yours. All that God asks me to do is to believe that

what Jesus did was enough. When Jesus said it's enough and it's finished, I believe it and I accept it. All by God's grace.

Let's pray. Father God, we're thanking You again this morning for the preciousness of life. Lord, thank You for every person in this room every person listening. Thank You, Father, for this community that You've placed us in to bring this message of hope and this message of the gospel and this message of the awesomeness of our God. All of life is precious. All of life is to be valued. Lord, give us boldness and courage to step into this world with this message of hope and healing. We pray all of these things in Jesus's name, amen.