



## **"Hearing and Weeping" (Nehemiah 1:1-7)**

### **I. INTRO**

- A. We have begun a series in the book of Nehemiah...
- B. Last week we considered Nehemiah's heart-ache when he heard that:
  - 1. God was not being honored in the city of Jerusalem where the presence of God was to be treasured, anticipated, and appreciated.
  - 2. And the city dwellers lives continued to be vulnerable and at risk.
- C. Because of Nehemiah's great love for God and his great love for people he experienced a holy discontent and an intensifying passion for God's fame and renown to be re-established in the city and in the people.
- D. Nehemiah was so stirred by his love for God and people that he came out of the comfort and security of the palace to step into the brokenness of the people of Jerusalem – just like Jesus did, leaving the comfort and perfection of heaven to step into our brokenness and sin -- living the perfect life that we could not live.
- E. Nehemiah stepped out of his own comfort zone to become and agent of renewal and restoration and that is a similar calling for us at KHC.
- F. Last week we spoke of the NT equivalent to Nehemiah being the Great Commandment found in Matthew 22:37-40 becoming the foundation for the Christian life. Everything flows from the calling of God to love God supremely and then to love people completely.
- G. God desires to use His people – the Church to bring about renewal and restoration.
- H. Today I would like to see if we can take Nehemiah's perspective and address a very controversial and sensitive issue in our culture today. That issue is the sanctity of human life.
  - 1. Today happens to be The National Sanctity of Human Life Day. The date is usually the third Sun of the New Year and the date was chosen to coincide with the anniversary of the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision and began back in 1984.

2. MLK Day is Mon, where we remember and pray for his dream to be realized...
- I. This issue of the sanctity of human life is a very **divisive** issue in our nation. There are a variety of opinions – probably even in this room.
    1. Some would say abortion is wrong all the time, no matter what.
    2. Some would say they are personally opposed to abortion but the final choice should be left to the mother.
    3. Some would say it's wrong but permissible under certain circumstances.
    4. Some would say it should be legal up to a particular point in the pregnancy.
    5. Some would say that it should always be legal and that it's not morally wrong.
  - J. In addition to being a divisive issue it's also a very **sensitive** issue. There are probably people in this room who have either HAD an abortion, or who have HELPED (or been complicit in helping) someone obtain an abortion.
    1. I will tell you that abortion has touched my life twice.
      - a. When I was in high school I helped a friend of mine obtain an abortion (I was not the father). She told her parents she would be at a friend's house for the weekend and another friend and I drove her to a clinic where the abortion was performed.
      - b. Another time a girl I was dating told me after-the-fact that she had chosen to abort our baby. At the time I was relieved.
    2. For many women (and men) who have chosen abortion along the way there can be a lot of sadness, guilt, and shame that never seems to go away.
    3. Some might even be here today that have had an abortion and no one in your life is aware of it.
    4. We want to provide prayer for any woman who wants it in Rm #3 after the service. There will be other women available to talk with you and pray for you if you would like. It will be private.
    5. For men you can email either Pastor's Dan, or Jason, or Henry – whichever one you feel most comfortable with, and they will arrange a time to meet with you, to talk with you, and pray with you.

K. Here is my thesis statement for our time together: "If the unborn are not human, no justification for elective abortion is necessary. But if the unborn are human, no justification for elective abortion is adequate." --Greg Koukl <sup>1</sup>

## II. BODY

A. I will read Nehemiah 1:1-7 and then pray for our time together...

B. *"The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month of Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, <sup>2</sup> that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire. <sup>4</sup> As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup> And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>6</sup> let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. <sup>7</sup> We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses."* --Nehemiah 1:1-7

C. Two additional verses to keep in mind as we move through our time this morning:

1. *"The Lord hates [the] hands that shed innocent blood."* --Proverbs 6:16-17
2. At the same time God loves the guilty and the broken: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that **whoever** believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."* --John 3:16 (emphasis added)
  - a. God is a God of mercy, restoration, and renewal.
  - b. The issues surrounding the sanctity of human life are complex, but as we look to Scripture and science I think we will find that the issue itself is not complex.

D. There is just one question that we need to answer – "What is the unborn?" Another way to ask the same question is, "When does life begin?" Does life begin at

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<sup>1</sup> *Precious Unborn Human Persons*, Stand to Reason 2014: 7. Koukl is a Christian apologist, radio talk show host, author, speaker, and the founder of the Christian apologetics organization Stand To Reason. © 2016 Gregg Caruso, King's Harbor Church. All rights reserved. We encourage you to use and share this material freely—but please don't charge money for it, change the wording, or remove the copyright information.

conception? Does life begin at the second trimester? The third trimester? Does life begin at birth?

1. If the unborn are NOT human, abortion is no big deal. An abortion would be no different than having a cyst or a tumor removed. Right?
2. And if the unborn ARE human no justification is adequate. Period.
3. Here's a way to think about it...
  - a. What if you're driving on the street and you see what looks like a baby blanket on the street ahead of you – and there's bulge underneath the blanket. Could you be held legally liable and accountable if you ran over the blanket and there WAS a baby underneath? (Sorry for the gruesome word-picture.) The answer, of course, is yes – if you COULD stop you SHOULD stop – or face legal consequences. Agreed?
  - b. If the unborn are not human it must be conclusively proven that they are not. It would it be wise to apply the same standard to this issue as we apply in our court system. Pro-choice advocates need to be able to prove "beyond a reasonable doubt" that a baby in the womb is NOT a human being.

E. As we engage this issue of the sanctity of human life today I would like to do three things:

1. I would like to read some verses to see what the Bible has to say about the sanctity of human life.
2. I would like to make mention of some scientific breakthroughs that seem to be helping the general public to make better sense of this controversial and sensitive issue. (And let me be clear that the scientific arena is NOT my area of expertise so my comments will be more general.)
3. Finally, I want to cite a few verses and thoughts regarding how to have a conversation with someone who has a very different viewpoint than yours. The verses, as well as my comments, will be applicable to other areas of disagreement in our church and culture – including theological issues as well as political leaders and political issues (families: money, sex, and power).

F. Let's take them one at a time:

### 1. **Scripture**

- a. "...Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you." --Jeremiah 1:5 The unborn is someone whom God knows, sets apart – for a purpose.
- b. "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. <sup>14</sup> I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. <sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. <sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my **unformed body**; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." --Psalm 139:13-16 (NIV, emphasis added)
  - 1) A poetic way of speaking of the mother's womb.
  - 2) There is one word in the Hebrew language for the phrase "unformed body." It's GOLEM and it means embryo or fetus.
- c. An angel spoke to Samson's mother about Samson: "Behold, you are barren and have no children; but you shall conceive and bear a son. <sup>4</sup> Therefore beware, and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, <sup>5</sup> for lo, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from birth; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines." --Judges 13:3b-5
  - 1) Nazirites took 3 vows:
    - a) They never cut their hair.
    - b) They never drank any wine – or touched anything that came from the vine, even grapes or the grape skins.
    - c) They were not to come in contact with anything that was dead.
  - 2) Samson was to be a Nazirite even in the womb of his mother.
  - 3) If his mom drank wine while she was pregnant, Samson by extension, would be breaking his Nazirite vow.
  - 4) Samson was called by God in his prenatal condition.
- d. John the Baptist "*will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.*" --Luke 1:15

- 1) He (apparently) experienced salvation and a baptism of the HS – even in his mother's womb.
  - 2) When Elizabeth and Mary meet when they both had become pregnant two things happened:
    - a) Elizabeth was filled with the HS (1:41)
    - b) "The baby leaped in my womb for joy." --Luke 1:44
  - 3) What we have is a distinct human person that is cognitive in the womb.
- e. *"He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world."* --Ephesians 1:4a
- f. It certainly seems clear from Scripture that God sees the unborn as human beings, created in God's image and created by God's hand and the unborn are to be treated as such -- and they are to be prized and protected.

## 2. Science

- a. Probably the greatest scientific breakthrough regarding the sanctity of human life is the advancement of the ultra sound or sonogram with its 3 and 4D imaging – and even real-time video.
  - 1) Parents can see the development of their children with their own eyes. The obstetric ultra-sound is typically done at 20 weeks gestation shows the active life of the child in the womb: clapping his or her hands, sucking his or her thumb, yawning, stretching, getting the hiccups, covering his or her ears from a loud sound nearby.<sup>2</sup>
  - 2) The **Pregnancy Help Center** in Torrance (which we support) reports an 80% success rate for 2015 when they are able to show pregnant women ultra sound images.

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<sup>2</sup> See "Fetal Development," MedlinePlus, accessed January 21, 2011, <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medline-plus/ency/article/002398.htm>; and "Your Pregnancy Week by Week: Weeks 17-20," WebMD, accessed March 15, 2011, <http://www.webmd.com/baby/guide/your-pregnancy-week-by-week-weeks-17-20?page=2>.

- b. The “product of conception”<sup>3</sup> (as some abortion providers describe the unborn) is a complete and genetically unique entity distinct from its human parents.
- 1) At conception the sperm with 23 chromosomes unites with an egg with 23 chromosomes to form a distinct entity -- the zygote that has 46 chromosomes.
  - 2) The zygote is a living human person with a life of its own and possesses the inherent capacity to rapidly oversee and direct its own development.
  - 3) This new single-cell human being immediately produces specifically human proteins and enzymes, and genetically directs his or her own growth and development. (In fact, this genetic growth and development has been proven not to be directed by the mother<sup>4</sup>.)
  - 4) The zygote contains the entire genetic blueprint that accounts for every detail of human development – sex, hair color, eye color, height, and skin tone – and even personality traits.
  - 5) Finally, this new human being the single-cell human zygote is biologically an individual, a living organism an individual member of the human species.<sup>5</sup>
- c. A 9<sup>th</sup> edition embryology textbook *Before We Are Born: Essentials of Embryology and Birth Defects* states this: “The zygote and early embryo are living human organisms.”<sup>6</sup>
- d. Human life is a continuum beginning at conception and ending at death. From the moment of conception human life exists and does not cease to exist until that person dies.

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<sup>3</sup> A term often used by abortion providers.

<sup>4</sup> Holtzer et al., "Induction-dependent and lineage-dependent models for cell-diversification are mutually exclusive," *Progress in Clinical Biological Research* 175:3-11 (1985); also similar work by, e.g., F. Mavilio, C. Hart.

<sup>5</sup> Dianne N. Irving, M.A., Ph.D. WHEN DO HUMAN BEINGS BEGIN? "SCIENTIFIC" MYTHS AND SCIENTIFIC FACTS, *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 1999, 19:3/4:22-36.

<sup>6</sup> Keith L. Moore & T.V.N. Persaud. *Before We Are Born: Essentials of Embryology and Birth Defects*, W.B. Saunders Company, 9<sup>th</sup> edition 2015: 500.

- e. The baby is not just a part of the woman's body the baby is a unique human person within the woman's body. See the difference?
3. A few verses and comments regarding **how to have a conversation with someone who has a very different view than yours.**
- a. This is where we must start: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." --Matthew 22:37-40
    - 1) The Great Commandment
    - 2) Last week we said that the people that have been used by God to do great things for God (like Nehemiah) have two things in common:
      - a) They love God
      - b) They love people (Do the people you interact and disagree with walk away with a sense that, "Well, I don't agree but I can really sense that they love God and that they love me.")
  - b. *"Be angry and do not sin..."* --Ephesians 4:26a
    - 1) Is it okay to be angry? Yes!
    - 2) Who did Jesus get really mad at? The religious people.
    - 3) We will see Nehemiah getting angry when he hears about the wealthy Israelites' exploiting the poor Israelites': *"Then I was very angry when I had heard ... these words"* --Nehemiah 5:6
  - c. *"Always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, **yet with gentleness and reverence.**"* --1 Peter 3:15 (emphasis added)
    - 1) Do the people you interact with who disagree with you – do they encounter gentleness and reverence?
    - 2) "Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out



darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that."<sup>7</sup> — Martin Luther King Jr.

### III. CONCLUSION

A. As we close I want to make two final points:

1. Jesus taught that the Christian community is to be an alternate society in which sex, money, and power are to be used in life-giving ways that differ sharply from the practices of the broader culture.
  - a. The sanctity of human life is a power issue.
  - b. The old saying, "Those with the power make the rules" is true regarding how the broader culture seems unwilling to stand up for the dignity and rights of the most at-risk of the human population – the unborn.
2. Along the way in our relationships with family, friends, and co-workers who do not hold or express a Christian worldview, we will hear them articulate a plethora of reasons why they find the Christian faith difficult to embrace.
  - a. It may be the biblical sex ethic of marriage being a covenant between one man and one woman for one lifetime.
  - b. It may be the Christian view of morality, which states that the sexual union of a husband and wife are reserved for the marriage covenant.
  - c. It may be because of not understanding God's purpose in our pain and suffering.
  - d. It may be because of a prolife stance.

B. In closing let me suggest to you that the questions of sex ethic, morality, the problem of pain and suffering, or a prolife stance do not address the REALLY important and essential question...

1. The essential question is, "Did Jesus rise from the dead?"
2. If Jesus rose from the dead, then we need to humbly and prayerfully engage all that He said and then deal with the implications; if He didn't rise from the dead, then we don't need to worry about any of what He said and taught.

C. The issue on which EVERYTHING hangs is not whether or not you like or understand all of the teachings of the Bible, but whether or not Jesus rose from the dead."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* Harper & Row 1967: 67.  
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## **P.A.S.S. Questions For Further Reflection and For KHC Life Group**

**P** - Participation (get everyone involved in the dialog)

1. Do you have any specific and repeatable steps that you take when making major life decisions?

**A** - Application (makes it personal)

2. Why is it important to understand that an unborn baby is distinct from the mother?
3. (See additional notes below) Professor Peter Singer says an individual's human worth is based on his/her usefulness to others. How does this logic carry over to infants, the elderly, the disabled, the sick, etc.?
4. How would you define a "meaningful life"? What is your basis for giving value to something?

**S** - Scripture (thinking biblically is a learned behavior! :-)

5. Read Psalm 139. (The main theme is that we are fully known and fully loved.)
6. According to 139:13-16, when did God first establish a relationship with each of us? What significance does this have for the unborn?
7. What two similar images or word pictures does David use in vs. 13 and 15 when he speaks of God creating him? What insight do these images give you about your creation?
8. Why does David thankfully praise God in 138:14? What does this verse tell you about how you should view our own existence?

**S** – Sharing (aim for a time of honest reflection, authenticity, and transparency in a safe atmosphere modeled by you). [Choose one of the following as a final dialogue question.]

9. What do you think of the statement; "There can be no equal rights for all women until there are equal rights for unborn women"?
10. How can we, as individuals and as a church, engage the larger community in respectful dialogue and activity to promote a prolife stance?

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<sup>8</sup> Adapted from Tim Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*.

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### Additional Notes and Scientific Research

- In 1993, ethicist Peter Singer shocked many Americans by suggesting that no newborn should be considered a person until 30 days after birth and that the attending physician should kill some disabled babies on the spot. Five years later, his appointment as Decamp Professor of Bio-Ethics at Princeton University ignited a firestorm of controversy, though his ideas about abortion and infanticide were hardly new. In 1979 he wrote, "Human babies are not born self-aware, or capable of grasping that they exist over time. They are not persons"; therefore, "the life of a newborn is of less value than the life of a pig, a dog, or a chimpanzee."<sup>9</sup> Singer's views express the philosophical doctrine of *functionalism*, which is the belief that what defines a human being is what they can and cannot do.
- American University philosophy professor Jeffrey Reiman (who also subscribes to the philosophical doctrine of functionalism) has asserted that unlike mature human beings, infants do not "possess in their own right a property that makes it wrong to kill them."<sup>10</sup>
- Human beings develop at a much more astonishingly rapid pace than originally thought:
  - The cardiovascular system is the first major system to function. At about 22 days after conception the child's heart begins to circulate his or her own blood, unique to that of the mother's, and the heartbeat can be detected in ultrasound.<sup>11</sup> (10<sup>th</sup> edition medical and dental student textbook)
  - At just six weeks, the child's eyes and eyelids, nose, mouth, and tongue have formed.
  - Electrical brain activity can be detected at six or seven weeks,<sup>12</sup> and by the end of the eighth week, the child, now known scientifically as a "fetus," has developed all of his or her organs and bodily structures.<sup>13</sup>
  - By ten weeks after conception the child can make bodily movements.
- **Fetal Pain**

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Singer. *Practical Ethics*, 1st ed. Cambridge University Press 1979: 122–23.

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey Reiman, *Critical Moral Liberalism*, Rowman and Littlefield 1997: 121.

<sup>11</sup> Moore and Persaud, *The Developing Human*, 10<sup>th</sup> edition, Saunders, 2015: 350-358.

<sup>12</sup> The Commission of Inquiry into Foetal Sentience (CARE and The House of Lords), "Human Sentience Before Birth," 2001: 3, 36.

<sup>13</sup> Marjorie A. England. *Life Before Birth*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Mosby 1996: 9.

Pain receptors (nociceptors) are present throughout the unborn child's entire body by no later than 20 weeks after fertilization and nerves link these receptors to the brain's thalamus and subcortical plate by no later than 20 weeks.

DOCUMENTATION:

- Myers, 2004, p.241, para.2, "The first essential requirement for nociception is the presence of sensory receptors, which first develop in the perioral area at approximately 7 weeks gestation and are diffusely located throughout the body by 14 weeks."
  - Myers LB, Bulich LA, Hess, P, Miller, NM. Fetal endoscopic surgery: indications and anaesthetic management. *Best Practice & Research Clinical Anaesthesiology*. 18:2 (2004) 231-258.
  - Smith S. Commission of Inquiry into Fetal Sentience. London: CARE, 1996.
- **Fetal Homicide Laws**

The debate over fetal rights is not new to the legislative arena. Every year pro-life and pro-choice advocates vie for the upper hand in this contentious issue. Legislation has defined the fetus as a person under fetal homicide or "feticide" laws such as the Fetal Protection Act, the Preborn Victims of Violence Act, and the Unborn Victim of Violence Act. Those supporting these acts, contend that both the lives of the pregnant woman and the fetus should be explicitly and individually protected.
  - **Food For Thought:** Neil Postman, a 20<sup>th</sup> century humanist, professor, and social critic makes the point that In pre-modern societies, the lives of children were not regarded as unique or valuable in the same way they are in modern societies. The reason being, he speculates, is because of the high infant mortality rates (i.e., keeping a perceived safe emotional distance).