



Pastor Joel C. Gerlach is Pastor and professor emeritus, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

By Rev. Joel Gerlach

Isaiah 49: 5 & 6 "And now the Lord says he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord and my God has been my strength he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

Friends in Christ,

Pro-Life Sunday [for our congregation] comes every year right in the middle of the Epiphany season. Perhaps there's something fortuitous about that. As far as the church year is concerned, that's where pro-life Sunday really belongs. That's because the pro-life theme and the Epiphany theme are in fact closely related to each other. Let me explain why.

This text is actually an Epiphany text. Isaiah's intention is to present to us another picture of the one he calls God's Suffering Servant, the Messiah, whose mission it was "*to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.*" But today I'm going to use these words of Isaiah to deal with another question: Why is God so intent on bringing "*salvation to the ends of the earth?*" The answer to that question is rooted in God's view of the sanctity of life itself. The sanctity of life is not explicit in these words of Isaiah, but it certainly is implicit. And that is what I want to talk to you about this morning: **THE SANCTITY OF LIFE.**

BACKGROUND

That's an appropriate subject for us to consider today particularly because this week marks the 19th anniversary of the infamous Supreme Court decision which legalized abortion. Since that fateful day, more than 26 million lives have been aborted in this country alone. Currently an abortion is performed for every 2.4 births. Abortion has become a national disgrace. Someone has aptly referred to the problem as "The American Holocaust." Hitler's holocaust during World War II pales in comparison to the legalized slaughter taking place in America today. More than 4,000 lives a day are being snuffed out mostly for reasons of convenience. At the root of the problem lies a loss of appreciation for the sanctity of life. I am not going to review with you today the biblical reasons for condemning open abortion. I am proceeding on the assumption that anyone who knows the Scriptures knows that God does not sanction abortion. Those who condone abortion hold a view of life that is in conflict with the Bible.

WHY HUMAN LIFE IS SACRED

Simply put, abortion is a sin because it disregards what the Bible teaches about the sanctity of life.

Human life is sacred because God is the author of all life. In effect God is telling us, "I give life and I take it away, and I don't want you playing God. I have made life sacred, and I don't want you to profane it. I want you to regard it as precious, to protect it, to nurture it and to cherish it." That is how God interprets for us the meaning of the commandment which says, "*You shall not murder.*" And in Psalm 139, God extends the hand of his protection even over the child in the womb, a child whom God clearly regards as a person. If we call ourselves the children of God, surely we can do no less.

THE MESSIAH'S MISSION

This is the view of life that is implicit in what Isaiah says in this text. Let's look at the words again. This is the Messiah speaking, telling us about his mission 7 ½ centuries before he was born. "*And now the Lord says — he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and to gather Israel to himself.*"

Even as Jesus is taking shape in the womb of his mother, God views him as a person. He's a servant with a mission to perform. His mission is to bring backsliding Israel back to God again. More than that. "*It is too small a thing for you to be my servant (just) to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*"

If there is one thing God is intent on doing, it's to give us the chance to enjoy the kind of life he had in mind for us when he created us. When God looks at our world and sees the kind of life we've made for ourselves, it grieves him. He knows what life could be and he's determined to give us a chance at it.

ABORTION'S DEVASTATING EFFECTS

A few years ago a raging fire consumed thousands of acres in Yellowstone National Park (Or: substitute another example to which your people can relate). The scene was one of total devastation. As I viewed it, all of a sudden I was struck by the thought of what it must have been like when God visited Eden after the Fall. All his hard work destroyed. All the beauty was gone when his lovely creatures discarded his image in favor of their own life style. But God doesn't give up easily. He said to his Son, his only begotten Son, "*I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*"

You know what abortion does? It wipes out that opportunity even before God gets a chance to reclaim that tiny life for himself. It eliminates the time of grace for that child even before it is born. Abortion shows absolutely no regard whatsoever for the sanctity of human life. The issue the Court raised in 1973 was expressed by Justice Blackman in these words: "The word 'person' in the Constitution does not include the unborn." But for a Christian that is not the issue. For us the point is that all life conceived in the womb is human life. And human life is sacred. God does not give us the option to stop what he starts regardless of whether or not we call it a person.

GOD'S CALL TO ACTION

So when it comes to the question of abortion, God does not give his people a choice in the matter (except when the life of the mother is at stake). Nor does God give us a choice as to whether or not we wish to become involved in the controversy this issue has raised. When Christian principles are being subverted, he expects us to stand up for the truth. How we become involved, he leaves up to us to determine. There are two ways in which we can become involved, as Christians and as citizens. For us as Christians, the question is a religious issue. For us as citizens, it is a civic issue. The religious question is answered for us on the basis of God's Word. The civic question is answered for us on the basis of the natural law which underlies our Constitution. (Natural law is just the name we give the instinctive knowledge of right and wrong left over after the Fall.) If the question is asked, "How do we bring our religious convictions to bear in dealing with a civic issue," (like open abortion) the answer is, "We don't." As Lutherans who cherish the principle of the separation of church and state, we don't advocate that jurists and legislators use the Bible to

decide issues of the state, nor do we determine what we believe and practice as Christians by appealing to the state for answers. (I might add here as an aside that two of the strongest arguments I have ever read against abortion were written by non-Christians, one of them, in fact, is an agnostic. It's their kind of argument that will have to decide the question of abortion in the civic arena.)

We were talking about involvement a moment ago, as citizens and as Christians.

As **citizens** we have ample opportunity to be involved in our community in various forums where we can make our views as citizens known to others. I think such efforts are important in getting the attention of the community and in raising the pro-life issue in the public forum. If as citizens we don't want to get involved in one way or another, we lose by default. And a crime that is eating away at the fabric of our society continues to destroy our way of life.

As **Christians** there is another way in which we can stand up for the sanctity of life. We can support with our prayers and our offerings the Christian Life Resources on the national and local levels. One thing I cherish about my church is that historically we've been doers more than talkers and we do what we do without a lot of public fanfare. Marches and protest rallies like the recent one in Wichita, Kansas have their place in a democratic society. And it's true of course that the final solution to this problem will require changing the law. But meanwhile Christian Life Resources quietly goes about the business of saving lives through its counseling centers. On a daily basis women who have obtained abortions or are contemplating one are being helped. They are reminded that if God could forgive penitent David for the murder of Uriah, then that same forgiveness extends to anyone today who comes to realize and to repent of the sin of violating the sanctity of life.

Several years ago Christian Life Resources held its national convention in Milwaukee. The counseling center in the Chicago area had an exhibit in the convention hall. The exhibit consisted of pictures of children who owe their lives to the fact that counselors at the center persuaded their mothers to change their minds about getting an abortion. Who knows? One day you may hear one of those children preach a sermon from one of our pulpits, or teach your children in a classroom of a Christian day school. That's the kind of effort that deserves our

support as Christians. *"He who formed me in the womb to be his servant...says, 'I will also make you a light for the gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth'."* Think about that! It tells you something about the sanctity of life. Amen.

The above courtesy of Christian Life Resources, the 1992 Pro-Life Sunday Packet; and Joel Gerlach; additional messages in this series can be found online at <http://www.christianliferesources.com/?/lifesunday/sermons.php>