

Psalm 139:13 - 18

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[0 : 00] This past Monday, three appeal court judges, Lord Justice McComb, Lady Justice King, and Lord Justice Jackson, overturned a ruling of Justice Leaven, a newly appointed judge serving in the Court of Protection in London.

You may have heard about this case. If not, I'll explain a little bit about it. Now, just to explain a little bit of the background, the Court of Protection, where the original ruling was given, is responsible for taking decisions on behalf of those deemed to be incapable of taking decisions for themselves, as they, to use the terminology, lack mental capacity.

Now, the case in question is no doubt a very complex and certainly a very delicate one, concerning a young woman with significant learning difficulties. From the reports that I've read, different things have been said, but what seems to be most said is that this particular woman has a mental age of approximately nine years old.

Now, this woman was 22 weeks pregnant at the time of the original ruling that I'll speak about in a moment. Now, that was just over a week ago. And Justice Leaven, responding to a request from the NHS, granted permission for a forced abortion to be performed on this woman.

And she considered that it was in the best interests of this woman for that to take place. Now, this was despite the fact that the woman herself was opposed to that.

[1 : 45] She wanted to have the child. And in addition, the woman's mother, so the grandmother of the child to be born, had indicated her willingness to care for the child.

Now, as I said right at the beginning, that ruling was overturned by the appeal court. Now, there has been considerable and understandable dismay at the prospect that in the event didn't happen, wasn't carried out, but at the prospect of a forced abortion being sanctioned in our country.

And yet, it is worth noting, and this is just a little bit of an aside, but it is worth noting or pointing that, that in a real sense, every abortion is a forced abortion from the perspective of the child being aborted.

Now, the case is a complex one about which much has been said. But perhaps the most significant, at least from my perspective, the most significant detail is something that Justice Leaven stated in giving her original judgment.

She argued that as the baby would be removed from the mother's care, because the mother wasn't in a position to care for the child, that as the baby would be removed from the mother's care, the mother would, and I quote, suffer greater trauma from having the baby removed as it would at that stage, once born, be a real baby.

[3 : 10] And it's particularly that last thing that the judge said, that once the baby was born, the baby would be a real baby. Now, it's really quite surprising that somebody with such a level of education would express themselves in such a ridiculous way.

But apparently, according to Justice Leaven, a baby in her mother's womb is not a real baby. Now, I've never been pregnant, and no doubt there would be some who would cry out, no uterus, no opinion.

But those of you who have, I'm sure, would express the opinion and would confirm that the baby in your womb was very real. And it beggars belief that a highly educated judge could make such a fatuous statement.

Not a real baby. You know, what the baby was, if it's not a real baby, an unreal baby, I'm not sure what the conclusion would have to be.

I think Justice Leaven would be well advised to observe simply a scan of a 22-week-old baby in the womb and tell me or anybody that's not a real baby.

[4 : 20] Now, the case has highlighted, of course, the bigger reality of abortion in the UK. And the value, status, and rights of the unborn. Thinking about the bigger picture, I just happened to notice today in one of the Christian papers that some of us get that last year in England and Wales, the statistics for Scotland are calculated separately.

But in England and Wales, there were 200,608 abortions performed, the highest recorded number of abortions in history, 200,608.

So that's the population of Aberdeen wiped out in one year in England and Wales. What does the Bible have to say in the face of these realities?

Well, it has quite a lot to say as it happens. And one passage that is often referred to in this connection, in our opinion of, in the conclusion we come to as to the value of life in the womb, a passage that is often referred to, as I say, quite understandably, is the passage that we've read in Psalm 139, and particularly verses 13 to 18, which we're going to spend a little time reflecting on this evening.

Now, the passage is not about abortion, but it does paint a striking picture of the beauty, intricacy, and value of life in the womb. And I want to spend a little time this evening considering what David has to say about his own prenatal life.

[5 : 47] David isn't giving a lecture on ethics. He's reflecting on his own life, and reflecting on his own life at that stage in his mother's womb.

And we are going to consider and ponder on what he has to say as he reflects on that aspect of his history and of his identity.

And we can outline what David has to say with the help of three headings. First of all, David acknowledges that he is created by God. That's the first thing, created by God.

But then also, he reflects on and expresses wonder at the reality that he is also loved by God. Created by God in his mother's womb.

Loved by God from his mother's womb. Perhaps even beyond, but certainly from his mother's womb. And then the third thing we're going to say, and this really is more about David's response to these truths, and that is awestruck by God.

[6 : 47] So, created by God, loved by God, and awestruck by God. First of all, created by God. In the first part of the psalm, God is acknowledged and praised as the God who knows all things.

As the God who is all-powerful. As the God who is omnipresent. As a remarkable, magnificent, glorious God.

And it is this God. This God who knows all things. This God who is everywhere. It is this God, says David, who created me. And this fact alone makes us special.

That was true of David. David could acknowledge that to be true. And we also can acknowledge that to be true. That God created us. Each of us. Dignifies us.

And grants us value as people. As men and women. We have been created by God. And what I want to do is just notice some aspects of God's creation of us.

[7 : 53] Of men and women. Of boys and girls. Some aspects of that creation that are highlighted in the verses before us. The first thing I want to notice is that this creation is what we could call a personal creation.

Verse 13. For you created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. What David is acknowledging is that the way this works isn't that God created Adam and Eve.

And then set the ball rolling. And then simply left our sexual instincts and biology to take care of the rest. He got the ball rolling by getting the thing in motion.

Creating the first couple. And then, well, just things flow from that. No. What David is acknowledging is that God continues to be engaged in this creative activity.

He continues to be intimately involved in our creation. He created David personally. He created David. The verse does not speak of God creating life.

[9 : 00] Though God, of course, does create life. But of God creating a life. The life of the author of the psalm. The life of David. He is able to declare, God created me.

It's personal. This creative activity of God. And so the author can declare, he created my life. He created me.

So as he was being formed in the womb, David with that identity is being created by God. And again, as we think about that, to just reflect again on the ridiculous affirmation of such a life not being.

A real life. Not a real baby. Personal creation. But secondly, another aspect of this creation by God is that it is intricate and holistic. In verse 13, notice what David says.

We've read the verse again, but drawing out this particular reality. For you created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. The human body is a marvelous thing.

[10:11] And all its intricate beauty has been, to use the language of the psalm, woven together by God as the master craftsman. There are those who can spend a lifetime studying and exploring one small part of the body.

Say the eye, or it could be some other part of the body. And at the close of a lifetime of investigation, they would acknowledge that there is still so much left unexplored of the multiple complexities of just one part of our body.

Our creation by God is intricate in its character. But also, we can call it holistic. And what do I mean by that?

It involves not only our physical frame, but also our emotional and spiritual identity. Notice what it says in verse 13 again.

For you created my inmost being. My inmost being. How would it be to understand what David is referring to there when he speaks about his inmost being? The actual word that he uses, the Hebrew word that he uses, is the word kidneys.

[11:20] And we think, well, that doesn't sound very poetic, and you wouldn't really like it to be translated like that, for you created my kidneys. You would say, well, that's true, but it kind of doesn't sound right, does it?

What's going on there? Well, the kidneys, of course, are a physical organ in our bodies. But when the word translated here, inmost being, this word kidneys is used in almost all the occasions. I think the only occasion when it's used in its literal sense of that organ is when the animal sacrifices are being spoken of. Then there's reference to kidneys, and it's speaking about actual kidneys. But all the other uses in the Old Testament of that word is used to refer to the emotional or spiritual aspect of our personhood.

And I think that's the way it ought to be understood here, and I think the way that the translators understand it, by using this expression, inmost being, for you created my inmost being.

[12:22] God's creative activity goes beyond the merely physical. Marvelous though that is, to include our innermost being, our heart and soul, our will and emotions, our spiritual identity, all created by God.

Hence, He knows us so well. That is what's going on in the womb. All of this is being woven together. And again, we stand back in dismay at the suggestion that all that is going on in the womb has nothing to do with a real baby.

Of course, there's another element in our creation that explains God's intimate knowledge of us. Not only that He's the one who has created us in such an intimate manner, but that He has created us in His own image and likeness.

It's not something that David explicitly mentions here in the psalm, but we know to be true. We have been created in the image and likeness of God. He knows us intimately then because, as the psalmist beautifully conveys, He has made us in all our multifaceted complexity, but also because, wonder of wonders, He has made us like Himself.

So God created us. David is acknowledging, God created me. His creation of me is personal in character. It's intricate and holistic. But there's another element of our creation that the passage highlights, and that is that God's creation of each of us is a planned and purposeful creation.

[13:55] Notice in verse 16, So we have all been created on the basis and following a perfect plan.

We're not the product of impersonal forces or blind processes whose principal ingredients are time and chance. We are all part of a perfect plan.

We have purpose. We have a reason for being. We are in the book, to use the poetic language that David employs. And the book doesn't simply contain the master plan for our design.

It's not some cosmic memory stick with all our DNAs, but the plan for our lives. It covers not only the dawn of our lives, but also the sunset, our alpha and our omega, and everything in between.

And for the believer, of course, who knows these things to be true. For those who have come to know and trust this God, to know that we have been created with this purpose in the mind of God, provides great comfort and assurance and direction.

[15:10] All the days ordained for me, determined and governed and planned by God. So, that's the first truth that we can draw from what David reflects on as he considers his own life and this part, this stage of his life in his mother's womb.

That takes us on to the second truth that David reflects on in these verses.

That is, not only that he is one who has been created by God, but also that he is loved by God.

Now, even the manner of our creation points to a loving creator.

The care, the attention to detail, the purpose in mind, they all point in the direction of love being the driving force, as it were, for God to create in such a manner.

But, beyond that, I want to particularly focus on the words that we find in verse 16, where we read there at the beginning of the verse, Your eyes saw my unformed body.

[16:21] Your eyes saw my unformed body. When the Bible speaks of God seeing us, it's not simply noticing that we're there. The language of God seeing his people is a language that speaks of relationship.

They speak of God not only seeing, but knowing. Of not only knowing, but loving. That look is a look of love. A look that, without words, announces that the one looked upon is of great value, is precious, is loved.

And what is being looked upon? Well, an embryo. A human life in the first hours or days or weeks following conception. Your eyes saw my unformed body.

You know, I mentioned at the beginning of the introduction that the judge would do well to look at a scan of a baby at 22 weeks. Now, if she were to see such a scan, she would see a formed body.

But here, the psalmist is speaking way before that.

He's speaking about God seeing his unformed body, where there might not be, by simply seeing what is before you, the ability to identify, by the physical features, a human body.

[17:33] But God saw David's unformed body at the very dawn of life. And that seeing of God speaks of God's, not only knowledge of David, but of God's love for David.

David, that embryo, that unformed body, is a person, has a name, is known by God, is loved by God, is in relationship with God, even though, of course, David at that stage wasn't able to acknowledge or recognize that that was the case.

But the relationship existed, even though his capacity to appreciate that it existed had not yet matured. What grants us value, what grants us personality, humanity in the womb, is not to be measured by the degree of our physical development, which is what sometimes people try and argue.

Well, it's only beyond a certain level of physical development that you can identify that which is in the womb as human. That's not what determines our humanity, the degree of our physical development, to be recognizably human, to have a developed nervous system, the capacity to feel pain, the potential for independent life out with the womb.

I don't think any of us, in fairness, has the potential for independent life outside the womb. We are all dependent on so many. What makes us people isn't any of these things.

[19:02] It's important to consider all of these things, but that's not what makes us human. It's not what makes us people. What makes us truly and precious human is to be known by God.

And this is what David declares about himself. Your eyes saw my unformed body. You saw me.

You knew me. You loved me. So, in the light of that, we must energetically and unsparingly, rigidly and stubbornly defend without concessions our conviction that human life begins at conception.

It's a conviction that, in turn, underpins our firm and non-negotiable rejection of abortion. To abort is to kill. To kill a person created in the image and likeness of God.

To kill a person known and loved by God. It is to destroy that which is precious and of incalculable worth in the eyes of God.

Very much a real baby. But the third thing that I want you to notice in what David ponders on and reflects on in these verses is that he is also awestruck by God.

[20:16] So, he's created by God. He's loved by God. But he is also one who is awestruck by God. And this, of course, relates to David's response to these truths that he is acknowledging.

Created by God. Loved by God. How does he respond? Well, he responds in awestruck wonder.

The response of the psalmist to what he is discovering about God, or rather what God is revealing to him concerning his origins is one of wonderment and marvel.

We capture that sense of marvel in verse 14. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. I know that full well.

He's awestruck by these truths. He's awestruck by the God who has created him and who loves him. And knowing God must produce in us such awe and wonder.

It must bring us to our knees in awestruck adoration before his power and majesty and glory and holiness and love and beauty. And if it does not, then we have to ask ourselves if we really know him at all.

[21 : 26] But let's consider for a moment what particularly produces wonder in the psalmist. Well, the first thing that we can say that produces wonder in the psalmist is himself. In verse 14, he says, I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

He's thinking about himself. He acknowledges that he himself is awesome, is wonderful. The nature of his creation, but the product of that creation is an awesome and wonderful thing.

And to recognize that for all of us is the proper foundation for what we might call biblical self-esteem, to acknowledge who has created us, the manner that he has created us, the love that he has for us.

I love myself because God loves me. I value myself because God values me. That is the basis for a proper self-perception. So, he is awestruck by himself, by the manner in which God has created him, but by himself.

But he's also in wonder, in awe, at the thoughts of God that he reflects on. In verse 17, How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!

[22 : 41] Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you. Here he is in wonder at the thoughts of God, at the truths about God that he's discovering, that are being revealed to him.

And not just any thoughts, not even the thoughts of God in all their variety, depth, and perfection, but his thoughts about and concerning David.

That's what David has been reflecting on, on himself and on how God views him. It is these thoughts of God that cause him wonder and leave him in awe at the reality of what he is discovering.

He's in awe at the thought that the creator of the universe knows him, thinks about him. God has wonderful and exciting thoughts and plans for David.

David occupies the mind of God. And that is the most remarkable thing that David stands in awe. How is it possible that God could be so preoccupied with me, so concerned about me, so intimately and intricately evolved in my life?

[23 : 49] How can that be? And yet it is so, and he stands in wonder at that reality. And of course, as that was true of David, so it is true of us.

It's true of you. You occupy the mind and the thoughts of God. As he expresses in the psalm, he cannot begin to count or enumerate the thoughts of God.

The waking hours are insufficient and sleep overtakes him. Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, the picture seems to be of him lying and pondering on all these amazing realities and sleep overtakes him.

He simply cannot exhaust all that would need to be recognized. And then when he awakes, what is his refreshing discovery? That he is still with God, that God is still with him.

When I awake, I am still with you. He is marvel. He is awestruck. He is open-mouthed, but open-mouthed to praise God.

[24 : 57] As he declares there in verse 14, I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. His response to these truths is one of praise and adoration.

What a sad condition for those who do not believe in God, for those who do not know God. They can see and appreciate the marvel of their own creation or of their own identity, of their own magnificence in many ways.

And yet they're devoid of an object, a personal God, to which they can direct their thanks and adoration. What David is acknowledging is that we, all of us, we may see so many of our weaknesses and our fallibilities and our limitations, but in the sight of God, we are marvelous.

We are wonderful. We are amazing. We are awesome in the literal sense of that word. We are to inspire awe at the manner in which God has created us and the depth of the love that he bears to us.

You are awesome. God has created us. He has created you. We are loved, and God loves you. Are we awestruck by these truths?

[26 : 19] Why do we so often fail to appreciate the marvels of God? In the mirror, even as we look in the mirror, there is a marvel of God in that mirror. Strange though that may seem to consider.

But also the marvels of God around us, in his word, in the face of his dear son, Jesus, his son, our Savior. And so we ask that God would open our eyes to see something of the wonder and the marvel of who he is and of his love and care for us.

Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. We echo the words of the psalmist. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

We thank you for the wonder of our creation. We thank you for that intimate involvement that you have in the creation of each and every one of us.

We thank you that we are indeed seen by you. You see us, you know us, you love us, and you care for us. Help us to consider our own value in the light of these truths that we are of worth, that we are of value because you value us, not because of any achievements that we might consider that we have or any merit that we think is our own, but our value is grounded in the value that you attach to us, in the manner in which you have created us, in our identity as those created in the image and likeness of God.

[27 : 48] And we pray that in the light of all these things we would respond in praise, in wonder, but also in seeking to give care and protection to our own lives and to the lives of others.

Help us to be careful in that regard and to give due care to ourselves and to others as those wonderfully and marvelously made.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.