

“GOD LOVED YOU BEFORE YOU WERE EVEN BORN!”

by Rom A. Pegram (4/8/18)

Once you've lived for a while, you come to realize that there are a handful of pivotal experiences in your life that you will never, ever forget! One of those pivotal experiences is the birth of your children. (For those who haven't had kids yet, just you wait ... and you'll soon know exactly what I mean!)

I'll never forget our first—Joshua, currently the Pastor of Wisconsin Rapids UMC. Before Jane and I ever had kids, we began to imagine what it would be like. We'd played with other people's kids and dreamt of one of our own someday. I know this may sound silly to you, but we not only prayed for healthy children; we went ahead and asked God—whatever the gender was—that we could have a brown-eyed boy ... or a blue-eyed girl. It's just something we desired ... in our youth & inexperience...

And I never told Jane all this, but I did a whole lot of dreaming before our kids were born. I dreamt what it would be like to play with them—to toss a football or fly a kite. Or to be part of a very important tea party (or whatever would be served at a kid-size table). I dreamt what it would be like to take walks with my kids—first in the stroller or pouched in one of those 'snuggly' things, then taking walks together or riding bikes...

The point is ... I began to love my kids way before they were born! I didn't wait until the day of their birth to begin to bond with them. When I knew that Jane was carrying our kids, and especially when they began kicking in her belly (and we began to talk to them), that's when my LOVE for them took hold! For anyone who has had kids before, you probably know what I mean...

And folks, I believe this to be God's way. Since we are made in the image of God (*imago dei*), it's only natural that we should act/ behave as God does. What am I saying today? In the same way I began to love my children even before they were born, *God is one who has loved us in the very same way!* If you need some help believing this, let's take just a moment and look to God's word:

- *We see God's love for us in Job 10:10-12 (NLT)* – “You guided my conception and formed me in the womb. ¹¹ You clothed me with skin and flesh, and you knit my bones and sinews together. ¹² You gave me life and showed me your unfailing love. My life was preserved by your care.”
- *We see God identifying us in Psalm 139:15-16 (NLT)* – “You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. ¹⁶ You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.” *Now, let me back up to verse 13 for just a moment...*
- *We see God speaking of our complexities in Psalm 139:13-14 (NLT)* – “You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.”

Now, here our Bible story for today from the prophet Jeremiah...

The LORD gave me this message: ⁵“I knew you before I formed you in your mother’s womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations.” ⁶“O Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I can’t speak for you! I’m too young!” ⁷ The LORD replied, “Don’t say, ‘I’m too young,’ for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you. ⁸ And don’t be afraid of the people, for I will be with you and will protect you. I, the LORD, have spoken!” ⁹ Then the LORD reached out and touched my mouth and said, “Look, I have put my words in your mouth!

Folks, in the same way I loved my kids before they were even here, *so God has loved you!* God loved you before you were even born ... and scripture’s a witness to that in several places. Let’s use today’s passage to look at that: Here, God says four specific things to Jeremiah about his incredible LOVE:

BEFORE YOU WERE BORN, GOD KNEW YOUR INDIVIDUALITY! Verse 5a again says, “Before I formed you in the womb...” So, even before God formed you *in the womb*, HE LOVED YOU!

King David speaks of God’s incredible love for him ever since he was conceived. Here’s Psalm 139:16 again—this time from Eugene Peterson’s modern translation called ‘The Message’:

“Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth; all the stages of my life were spread out before you, the days of my life all prepared before I’d even lived one day.”

What David is explaining here is the *unique individuality* that was his ... from his first moments in the womb! From the very first moments of his life, *God knew David* and designed his life from there ... and quite a life God had planned!

Now, writing several generations after David, we hear the Gospel writer Luke echoing Jeremiah’s thoughts ... and David’s thoughts... Luke shares the familiar story of the pre-birth relationship God had with *John the Baptist* and *our Lord* (Luke 1:39-44, NLT)...

A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town ⁴⁰ where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ At the sound of Mary’s greeting, Elizabeth’s child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, “God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. ⁴³ Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? ⁴⁴ When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy.

So, here we see God's LOVE for each of these individuals—even in the womb ... and recognizing their individuality—*one to make the way for our Lord ... and one to be our Lord!* Let me continue showing you how *God loved us even before we were born*—back to the prophet Jeremiah...

BEFORE YOU WERE BORN, GOD KNEW YOUR DIGNITY! Verse 5b says, "...I knew you [*and just how much you were worth*]." Before you were born, God knew you and all your little quirks! So along with LOVE comes *dignity—an innate right to be valued*. Please hear me clearly today, because God's word bears this out: *All life has dignity and value in God's sight!*

In Colossians 1:16 (NLT), Paul says: "...for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see— such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. *Everything was created through him and for him* [italics mine]." Everything has come into existence *through Christ and for Christ. Creation is not about us; it's about him...*

I received a phone call the other day that was *a first* for me. A guy called about his decision to put his dog to sleep. Apparently, he'd had the dog for a long time and he loved his dog and seriously valued their friendship. I don't know about you, but I don't think that's strange at all; our pets become a very real part of our family, don't they? And when they get older and ill, these decisions are not easy to make. So, he called to talk about it. But, here's what really hit me from our conversation: Knowing that we are made in the image of God, I saw the love of God in this young man and his deep love for his canine friend! He didn't feel he had a right to decide when the dog's life would end ... and how many of us have felt similar feelings at various times in our lives? Our love for our pets can be very, very strong indeed! We grant their lives *dignity—an innate right to be valued!* 'Can you guess where that comes from [God]?'

So, here's the deal: If we can see the love of God even in how we relate to our pets—*giving their lives dignity and value*, how much more do you think God gives *us* dignity and value? GOD LOVES YOU ... and did even before you were born! Here's something else:

BEFORE YOU WERE BORN, GOD KNEW YOUR POSSIBILITY! And Verse 5c says, "...before you were born I set you apart." Before you were born, God set you apart (sanctified you) for a specific purpose...

Going back to the first book of the Bible, we read this (Gen. 1:26-27, NLT): "Then God said, "Let *us* make human beings in *our* image, to be like *ourselves*. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground." ²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." As some have said in the past, here was the first Divine Conference amongst the Godhead before humanity is created; out of this Conference came God's determination to create humanity in his own image!

To illustrate what was going on here, think of a proud new father waiting to hold his child for the first time. When the smiling nurse brings that red-faced, squinty-eyed little bundle over to him, the father smiles all over! His joy overflows ... and he can't help but whisper a prayer of thanksgiving. This is his living, breathing child—bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. This child is the special creation of himself and the love of his life—his wife. Already, the father sees—with a rush of excitement—that the baby looks a little like him (and a little like his wife). This child bears his image!

This ecstatic experience of a new father reflects how God, looking through the window of time, feels about you and me. All of his creation is good—no exceptions! You are precious to him beyond all imagination, and you have possibilities beyond *your* wildest dreams (but not God's)! And, finally...

BEFORE YOU WERE BORN, GOD KNEW YOUR LEGACY! Verse 5d shares, “I appointed you as a prophet to the nations,” God told Jeremiah. Before you were born, God knew what you'd do (*or should do*) with your life. God gifted you to do what he wanted you to do with your life ... and GOD LOVES YOU enough not to leave your life to chance. Before you were born, God knew your LEGACY!

Folks, GOD LOVES YOU so much ... that his love for you began even before you were born! Nothing but LOVE can account for God's seeing us and caring for us even before we were conceived, born, or had committed our first sin. It's important we come to this understanding—that we see this 'big picture'...

God loves you today. And your legacy—and my legacy (as we live by faith), is that GOD LOVES US ... forever!