

Why Is There Chaff in My Wheat?

And Why Is Revival So Messy?

Rockey Jackson - March 30, 2001

Section 4 of 9

Do You Believe in Babies and the Afterbirth?

About the afterlife we know

Our Lord will take us out for afterglow.

But we wonder, "What on earth

Is this thing called afterbirth?"

Do you believe in God and the afterlife? How about babies and the afterbirth? All joking aside, in human beings the equivalent of wheat and chaff is a baby and afterbirth. We've insulated ourselves from many of the messy and unpleasant realities of life in our artificial western world. Not long ago it was common for loved ones to be born and to die at home with all of their family close by. Even children were normally acquainted with the reality of both the birth and the death of significant people in their lives. Most people in our society today have never been present for a birth or a death unless they happen to be one of the principles involved. These events are just too messy and disturbing. So we've moved them out of our homes and into institutions where the professionals who are better equipped can handle them for us.

Let's take a closer look at birth. We are much more familiar with it. After all, we've each been present for at least one. Today many fathers are in the delivery room supporting their wives during the birth of their children. Often children have the opportunity to watch the miracle of birth when pets are born at home. So many are aware that there are actually two deliveries every time a new baby comes into the world. First the baby is delivered and then the mother delivers what we commonly call the afterbirth. The afterbirth is made up of the placenta and other membranes called the amnion. The placenta partially surrounds the baby and is tied to the baby by the umbilical cord. The umbilical cord transports oxygen and nutrients from the placenta to the growing baby. The amniotic sac holds the amniotic fluid that surrounds and cushions the baby in the womb. Now when my children were born, and I think this is common, the doctor conveniently sent me to the nursery with my newborn child while he delivered the afterbirth. It went straight into a pan and a nurse quickly took it from the room to discard it. My wife didn't have to look at it either. It's just one of those messy things that we don't want to deal with.

On the ranch I wasn't so fortunate. Cows, like people, sometimes need help when their calves are born. It's called "pulling the calf" because that's what is actually done. The rancher reaches up inside the cow through the dilated birth canal and helps the calf get into the proper position to come out. The correct birth position has the head and both front feet coming first. A breach (backend first) delivery is a whole different situation that could require a veterinarian's help, possibly even a caesarian section. But most often what blocks the birth is just a front leg that missed the birth canal and tuned back. After the calf is manipulated into the proper position, the rancher takes hold of the two front feet and pulls as the cow pushes to help get the calf out.

Every day during the calving season we'd look over the herd for any cows that were showing the beginning signs of labor. We would separate them out and bring them into the barn where they would have shelter and we could check them every few hours. If a cow was in hard labor for several hours and making no progress, she would begin to tire. That's when we knew we would have to help and if the cow was tired enough, she would accept our help.

Here's how it would go. First I would step into the stall with her. If she was ready for help, she would just give me a tired look and continue to lie still. Then I'd move around behind her so I could inspect the situation. Often times what I'd see would be a pink nose and just one hoof sticking out of the birth canal. The other front hoof was caught and the cow couldn't push the calf on through. I had to reach in through the birth canal to get that other hoof, but the head of the calf was blocking the way. So I had to start by pushing the calf's head back into the womb. Now the amniotic sac had broken hours before and most of the amniotic fluid had already drained away, but the calf and womb were still wet with the clear slimy fluid. Once I'd pushed the calf's head back into the womb, I began to feel around for that missing foot. There it is, doubled up and held tightly against the calf's body. Not much room to work in here. Hang on. Here comes a contraction. I can't do anything until the contraction ends. Things are just too tight.

Now I want to help you see this. I'm in a barn, in a stall, on my hands and knees in straw that was clean when we put the cow in the stall. I have my right arm stuck up to my shoulder in the back end of a cow that's having a contraction. Now the cow's bunghole is located directly above the birth canal. She knows that she's got to push something out back there but she's not sure exactly what. It's not uncommon in that situation to get an ear full of fresh green manure when the cow has a bowel movement in the midst of her contraction. Fortunately that never happened to me. I can't say, though, that I was above laughing when I saw it happen to someone else.

Ah, the contraction is easing. I push the calf back a little further to make some room. With my help, the leg straightens joint by joint. Okay, I guide both front feet into the birth canal. Only the head is left to get into position before the next contraction comes. Come on now calf. Turn your head this way. That's it, put your nose right here in the birth canal. Uh oh, here comes another contraction. Ow!

Now I'm getting a personal lesson in the trauma of birth as my wrist is caught between the calf's head and the cow's pelvis. This cow is serious about wanting that calf out of her, but my wrist is now blocking the way. I thought this cow was tired, but the excruciating pain in my crushed wrist is evidence that she has quite a bit of strength left. Thank God, she's letting up! I quickly remove my arm and manipulate my wrist and hand. Nothing's broken and I should be okay when the blood starts flowing to my hand again.

The cow begins to tense again. This time I grab both of the protruding front feet and pull for all I'm worth. The head is coming and now it's out. I rest a couple of seconds and then pull again to deliver the shoulders. The front shoulders come slowly through the birth canal and the hindquarters tumble out after them.

Now I'm sitting in the straw with a slimy wet newborn calf in front of me. My arms and hands are covered with the same slimy amniotic fluid. There are little streaks of blood that testify to the

trauma it took to bring this little calf into the world. The cow looks around at us with a look that says: "It's about time." Another miracle of birth has occurred. Will this one live? I begin to rub the calf's side to encourage it to breath. One gasp. Then two. Okay, the calf's breathing. I take a pair of scissors and cut the umbilical cord that is still dangling from the birth canal. The end that is still attached to the calf is painted with antiseptic to keep infection out.

As I clean myself up the cow easily delivers the afterbirth with a few more contractions. The afterbirth is ugly, gross, and disgusting. Believe me, you don't want me to be anymore graphic than that. I may have had my arm up to the shoulder in the back end of a cow, but I'm not touching that thing. So I take a pitchfork from the isle, slip it under the afterbirth and lift. Out the door and on the trash pile it goes.

A rancher doesn't curse the afterbirth. It's very important to him. He knows that it's the package his calf comes in, but it's important to know the difference between the calf and the afterbirth. It's the same with parents and babies. No parents would build a cradle for the afterbirth, take it home, and give it a place of honor in their home. They don't show it off or brag about it to their friends. Can you imagine a mother and father keeping the afterbirth and discarding their baby? In only a short while the stench of the dead rotting tissue would tell them of their mistake, but wise parents don't curse the afterbirth either. They know that it is an integral part of pregnancy. It is the source of both oxygen and nutrients for the baby as it grows in the mother's womb. It's the package their baby comes in. Only at birth is the baby separated from it and only then is the afterbirth discarded.

The Apostle Paul writing to the church at Thessalonica gave them this word of spiritual instruction and encouragement:

"Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good" 1 Thess. 5:19-21.

If I were to extract the principles from this scripture and apply them to birth and afterbirth, I'd say: "Do not kill the new life growing in the womb. Do not despise the things necessary to bring it to fruition. When the birth occurs, differentiate between the baby and the afterbirth. Throw the afterbirth away and only keep the baby!"

A friend of mine recently rejoiced to learn that he and his wife were to have their first child. Their joy was doubled when they found out that twins were on the way. A sonogram revealed a little girl and a little boy growing together in the protection of their mother's womb. However, their joy was turned into great concern when the amniotic sac containing their little girl developed a leak and all of the amniotic fluid slowly drained away. Their little girl no longer thrived or grew. Now great care was taken to prolong the pregnancy for the sake of their little boy. If the little girl died, the mother's body would terminate the pregnancy and her twin brother would die too. When the doctors felt that the little girl had held on as long as she could, labor was induced. The doctors didn't expect the little girl to survive the trauma of birth, but she did. And her parents had a few minutes to meet her and say goodbye. Their sorrow was mitigated somewhat by the joy they felt from the birth of their son Shawn who, because of his sister's distress, came into this world about two months premature. After a ten-week hospital stay, little

Shawn went home with his proud parents where he's growing and doing fine. My friend and his wife didn't curse the afterbirth; they knew it is what they desperately needed. In the midst of their ordeal they would have gladly given their life's savings (maybe an arm and a leg too) for afterbirth in good condition. But a new one could not be bought at any price.

When I was little my mother sang a lullaby to me that everyone knows, it was "Rock-a-bye Baby." I didn't understand it at the time and it made me wonder if my mother knew how to take proper care of me. Why would any good mother hang her precious baby's cradle way up in a tree where the wind could tip it over and the baby fall to the ground? Well I'm no longer confused. I've learned what the lullaby means. Below I've written a second verse from the mother's perspective. Line by line it decodes this ancient rhyme.

*Rock-a-bye baby
In the treetop.
When the wind blows,
The cradle will rock.
When the bough breaks,
The cradle will fall
And down will come baby,
Cradle and all.*

*Have no fear little baby inside of me;
Above my pelvis, you're safe in mommy.
As my breath comes in and goes out,
Within my womb you rock gently about.
When my waters break where you move about,
My womb will move down to let you come out.
And you'll be delivered for all the world to see,
Along with the afterbirth no longer needed for thee.*