

Babies

Go Instantly To

Paradise

When They Leave Earth

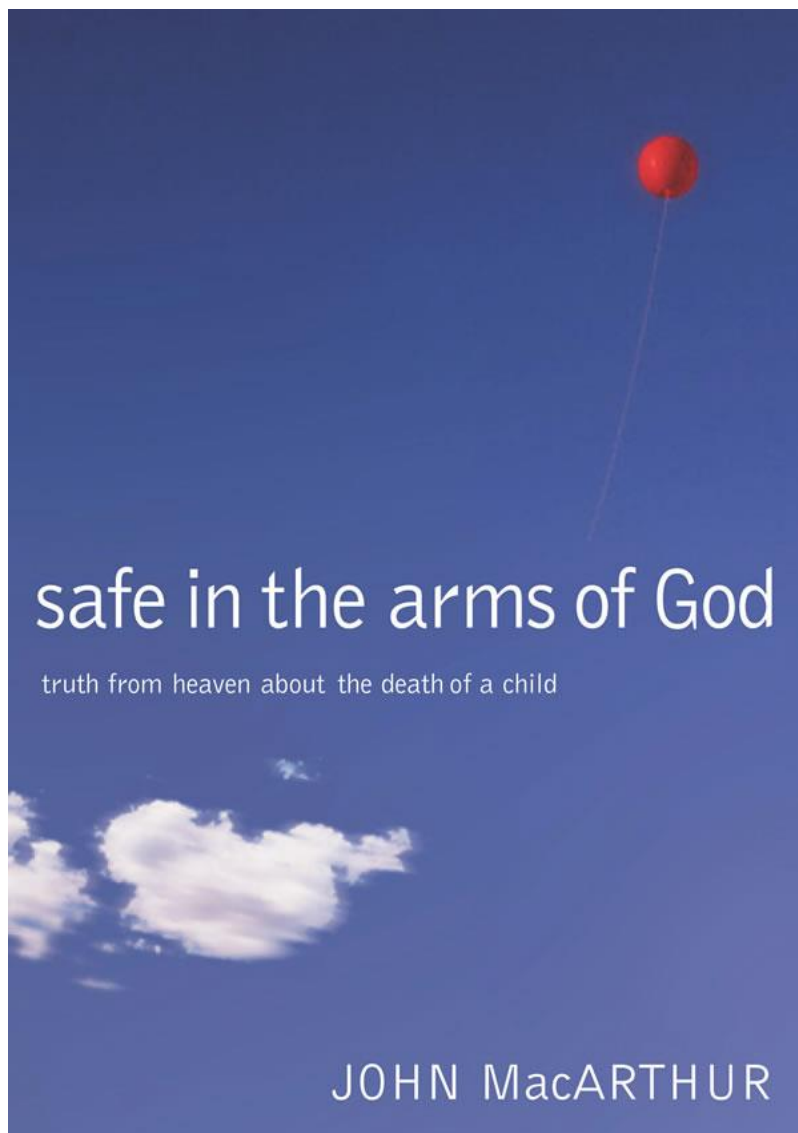
Jesus spoke of Heaven as Paradise (Luke 23:43).

The next 30 pages are two sermons that was written by John MacArthur (www.gty.org).

The first sermon was preached on October 7th 2001, and the second on October 14th 2001.

John went on to write a book “Safe in the Arms of God” – that book was published in 2003.

(<https://www.gty.org/store/books/451146/safe-in-the-arms-of-god>)



The Salvation of Babies Who Die, Part 1

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 80-242

Some of you who tuned in to *The Larry King Show* a week ago Saturday will remember that Larry fired a question to me on the air that came out of nowhere, a question that reveals a nagging, troubling issue in the human heart. He asked me, "What about a two-year-old baby crushed at the bottom of the World Trade Center?" I answered, "Instant heaven." He replied with another question. "Wasn't a sinner?" I again answered, "Instant heaven."

That's a compelling question. What about a baby crushed at the bottom of the Trade Center? What about any baby that dies? It's an agonizing question. It's a question that plagues Christians and non-Christians alike. What happens to babies that die?

All kinds of strange answers have been offered in the past. We don't need to deal with those, we need to know the right answer. I said, "Instant heaven." Now, what was my authority for saying that? In a sound-bite environment like that, I didn't have time for an explanation and he didn't ask for one. But you deserve one, so I'm going to tell you why I said what I said.

We're often hearing these days from those who are against war of any kind the statement, "Many innocent children will die. And what about them?" This matter of death that exists in the world is obviously a massive force that operates in the realm of the little ones, and we need to understand what it indicates, what it means. Life begins at conception, that is clear in Scripture. This is what the Bible teaches without question. So any death from the point of conception on is the death of a person, and persons have eternal souls.

Millions, perhaps billions, of such souls have died throughout history. Millions continue to die today. In fact, cumulatively, in the modern era, billions. One report I read in a book called *Empty Arms* says that up to twenty-five percent of all human conceptions do not complete the twentieth week of pregnancy; one out of four conceived die. Seventy-five percent of fatal deaths occur in the first twelve weeks. Neonatal death (that is, death in the womb); perinatal death (that is, death at the time of birth) occur in massive numbers even today with medical advancement.

We have a larger population in the world than we've ever had, we have a lower mortality rate than we've ever had because of medical advancement, we still have a massive amounts of death. The latest statistics from the year 1999 indicate four million, three hundred and fifty thousand babies died in that year, infant mortality. A study that concludes four million three hundred and fifty thousand babies died is based upon statistical information and estimates are that the figures are so low that the actuality maybe more than that figure by double since most losses during pregnancy may not even be reported.

The highest rates of infant mortality are found in the poorest and most primitive nations and at the same time the most pagan nations, mostly in Africa and Asia. Take four million three hundred and

fifty thousand in the year 1999 and just keep adding the years, and you can see the numbers of deaths are massive - staggering. These are, as I said, eternal souls and the question about where are they, then, is of monumental significance. They're either populating hell at an incredible rate or populating heaven at an equally incredible rate or getting divided into heaven and hell.

This is a question that needs to be answered, it needs to be answered on the large scale, it needs to be answered on the individual scale. A parent has the right to know. Where is my baby? Where is my child? Where is that adult child of mine whose mind never developed and who, for all intents and purposes, mentally is still an infant? The death of one single baby in a family, the loss of one in the womb, the loss of a child at birth is significant.

There was a study some years ago that I read called "Mental Reactions to Perinatal Death," and it chronicled the parental reaction to the loss of a baby around the time of birth. Sixty percent of the parents surveyed were angry. Fifty percent of the men felt guilt. Ninety percent of the women felt guilt about the death of that child. Seventy-five percent were irritable. Sixty-five to seventy-five percent of the parents lost their appetite. Eighty to ninety percent lost their sleep, and ninety-five to a hundred percent of them felt a profound and deep sadness. It's important to understand that there are some amazing impacts of this on the life of parents.

So when you look at it in the broad scale, millions upon millions of these little ones dying or you look at the individual level and you see the sorrow and sadness that it brings into the life of a family, either perspective cries out for an answer. From the agonizing mother in Afghanistan where a hundred and fifty babies out of a thousand die - at least that's the figures that are reported and it's likely double that - or the poor, hungry mother in Angola where it is reported that two hundred out of a thousand die (and it's likely double that) to you here in our congregation who lost a little one along the way, there needs to be an answer.

There needs to be an answer from God, there needs to be an answer from God's Word to this troubling reality of infant death. You start adding up the years, you start adding up the millions, you start adding up the billions, the question, "Where are they?" becomes a very compelling question. And you can add to that the very, I suppose, somewhat strange biblical indication that God Himself acknowledges - even authorizes - the death of some infants. For example, in Isaiah 13:16, when God called for judgment on Babylon, He said, "Their little ones also will be dashed to pieces before their eyes."

When God called for Assyria to make a war of judgment on Israel, He said - in Hosea 13:16 - "Their little ones will be dashed to pieces," the same statement. The same was said of Assyria's war on Egypt in Nahum chapter 3 and verse 10. Amazingly, Psalm 137:8 and 9 says, "O daughter of Babylon, you devastated one, how blessed will be the one who repays you with the recompense with which you have repaid us, how blessed will be the one who seizes and dashes your little ones against the rocks." Blessed will be a nation who punishes Babylon, even including the death of little ones.

What happens to these little ones, the death of which God authorizes, in a sense, in fulfilling His judgment purposes? I suppose it would also be fair to say that when a birth is successful, this is because God has allowed that to happen. We can say what David said in Psalm 22, verse 9, "Yet thou art He who didst bring me forth from the womb. Thou didst make me trust when upon my mother's breast upon thee I was cast from birth. Thou hast been my God from my mother's womb."

David acknowledged that life came from God, and when that life survived the womb and the birth and actually began to live, it was a life that God had allowed to live. No death occurs apart from the purpose of God, no life occurs apart from the purpose of God.

Now remember, in the original creation, there was no death. And man, according to Genesis 1:26 to 28, was given the power to procreate; that is, to produce life in a deathless world. That was God's original intent, that Adam and Eve would be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and they would literally produce life in a deathless world so that no life conceived would ever die. However, when Adam and Eve sinned, death came on all, and death comes to all, and it comes to many in infancy and childhood.

I suppose it would be an educated guess to say that perhaps half of the people ever conceived die before they reach any level of maturity. And again I ask the question: How does God deal with them? Is the answer comforting? Is the answer encouraging? Is the answer hopeful? Or is it discouraging? Do they go instantly to heaven? Why did I say that? I'm not the first one to try to deal with this, but there are a lot of people who aren't dealing with it today.

I was on a panel at a conference, a large conference, with three other pastors and it was a question-and-answer panel, and I was sitting up there with these other very fine pastors whom I love and respect. And one of the questions that came from the audience was, "What happens to babies that die?" And they went down the first three and the answer in each case was, "I don't know," which isn't very comforting. And it puts me in a terrible spot because when it came to me I said, "They go to heaven. They go to heaven." And I tried to give a brief explanation of why I believe that's true.

But I thought, as I've looked back on that so many times, how can you be a pastor and not get an answer to that question? Because you're dealing with people constantly who go through this. Even C. S. Lewis agreed with me. Now, he didn't know it. C. S. Lewis, in his wonderful book, *The Last Battle*, wrote about a terrible train accident, one of those terrible disasters that killed all the children in a family. And that surfaced the question, What about those children?, as any disaster does. This is what he wrote: "And as God spoke, He no longer looked to them like a lion."

You remember, he pictures God as a lion, Aslan. He said, "As God spoke, he no longer looked to them like a lion, but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us, this is the end of all stories, and we can say most truly that they all lived happily ever after. But for them, it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world had only been the cover of the title page. Now at last they were beginning chapter one of the great story, which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before," end quote.

That's the inimitable C. S. Lewis saying they were ushered into the real story. Now, that's prose, I know, but it's true, isn't it? It's right - isn't it? - to tell parents when children die, they do live happily ever after.

I think the Word of God will affirm the salvation of little ones who die. A place to begin, Psalm 139. Psalm 139. What I'm going to do tonight is just give you a little bit of a look at Psalm 139, then I want to talk a little theology with you, and I'm going to be precise as I can because this demands precision. And then next Sunday night, I'm going to support the theology with the text of various scriptures, so this will be a two-part look at this issue.

Psalm 139 does provide for us a good starting place. I want you to look at verse 17. This is a place to launch our look, and then we're going to go backwards in this first part of Psalm 139. "How precious also are thy thoughts to me, O God; how vast is the sum of them." The psalmist, David, has captured some precious thoughts here - precious, divine truths that mean so much to him, that's why he calls them precious. They are treasured truths. They are gems to hold onto. And what are they? Let's go back and find out.

First precious truth that the psalmist grips is that God knows everything about him, even before he could talk. Look at verse 1, "O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me, thou dost know when I sit down, when I rise up. Thou dost understand my thought from afar. Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down and are acquainted intimately with all my ways." You know everything about me - everything about me. You know me. You know when I sit down, when I rise up - in other words, you know every detail of every moment of every day. You know what I think. You know my path. You know my sleeping.

You know everything intimately about all my ways, and you have known it even before there is a word in my tongue. Before I could ever speak you knew everything about me. I was known to you in every element of my life. "Behold, O Lord, you know it all." God knows everything about me, even before I can talk.

The second precious truth is that God is actively involved in my life. Verse 5, "You have enclosed me behind and before. You've laid your hand on me." In other words, you've got me backed up on both sides and covered on top. You're active in my life. I'm in the middle and you've got me surrounded. Verse 6, he says, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it's too high, I can't attain it." You know everything about me before I can speak. You have my life completely in your hands. You have pressured me from both sides. You've kept me contained. I can't get out the top because you're there. It's a precious truth, isn't it? From the very start, you're actively involved in controlling my life.

A third precious thought is that God will never lose sight of or knowledge of me. There is no way I can ever be lost to you. "Where can I go from your Spirit?" Verse 7, "Where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, you're there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, then there thy hand will lead me, thy right hand will lay hold of me." I can't go anywhere outside of your knowledge. I can't go anywhere outside of your vision. I will never be lost to you.

The fourth precious truth is that God will never be limited in that knowledge, no matter how dark it gets. This is sort of metaphoric language, in a sense, it's never going to be so dark - you say, "Well, I could see you in the light, but things might get so dark that God loses His view." No, he says in verse 11 and 12, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, I might say, and the light around me will be night." In other words, I'm going to fall into some circumstance, I'm going to fall into some problem, some dilemma, some condition, and it's going to be so dark, the Lord isn't going to be able to find me. And then verse 12, he says, "Even the darkness is not dark to thee. The night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to thee."

Now, the point of this is these are credibly precious thoughts of the psalmist, and what they tell us is that God knows every single detail about his life from beginning to end, starting before he could

ever say a word. How is it that God has this personal, intimate knowledge? Answer: Because God is - and here's the fifth precious thought - God is his personal Creator. Verse 13, "For thou didst form my inward parts. Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb." You put together the male chromosomes and the female chromosomes, you wove my DNA. You made me, personally.

The sixth precious thought is in verse 16. You determined my destiny. You planned my life. "Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance." You saw me in your sovereign view before I was ever formed. "And in your book, everything about me was written down, the days that were ordained for me when as yet there wasn't one of them."

Now, these are precious thoughts. God knows everything about me, even before I can talk. God is in complete control of my life. God will never lose sight of me, no matter what goes on. I can never be lost to God. There is no circumstance that can in any way limit His knowledge. The reason He knows me so well is He is my personal Creator who has planned carefully my destiny. Those are precious thoughts.

It's not as if lives are being conceived willy-nilly and God's not involved. This is not just true of David. David is speaking for every man. He is speaking of intimate association between God and each human creation. God is intimately involved in every little life - every life. It's not just a chain of procreative acts that He inaugurated, He is there in every single conception. These are precious thoughts because this indicates to us how precious every life is. If every life is so precious that God knows it all, plans it all, guards and protects it all, never loses sight of anything, then they must matter to Him.

They must matter to Him. And we could conclude from that alone that since God is by nature a Savior and since God is not willing that any should perish but all should come to repentance and since God would have all men to be saved, there's every reason to believe just from that alone that a caring God who created that life to begin with, who superintends and guards that life, who knows intimately everything about that life, should that life perish physically in its infancy, there would be every reason from that Psalm alone to trust the grace of God who is by nature a Savior in behalf of that life.

Let me show you a couple of other passages - and we're just starting to build a foundation here. In Job chapter 3, verse 16 and 17 - again, I don't like the NAS translation of this as well as I like the New King James, so those of you who have the New King James version have a leg up on the translation. I'm going to read the New King James, it's a better representation, I think, here. Job is - he's in some serious despair. How do we know that? Verse 1, Job 3. "Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth." Pretty serious despair.

Job said, "Let the day perish in which I was to be born and the night which said, 'A boy is conceived.' May that day be darkness." I wish I had never been born, this suffering is so profound - never been born. In verses 16 and 17, this is what he says: "Why was I not hidden like a stillborn child, like infants who never saw light?" Why didn't I die in my mother's womb? "There, the wicked cease from troubling. There, the weary are at rest."

What's he saying? He's saying I'd be better off if I miscarried. I would be better off if I were stillborn so I wouldn't have to face troubling life, but I would enter immediately into what? Rest - rest.

Job understood that dying as an infant would bring one to rest and one would escape the pain of suffering. He certainly didn't believe that infants that die go to hell and some eternal torment but rather had the confidence that they entered into rest.

In Ecclesiastes also, in chapter 6 - you don't have to turn to it you can just jot it down. Ecclesiastes 6:3 to 5. Solomon laments, he laments that a stillborn child is better off than a person who lives a thousand years twice and doesn't enjoy the right things. He says, "What's the point of living two thousand years if you don't ever enjoy true goodness? You'd be better off a stillborn child."

In both of these cases, you have by implication the idea that being stillborn takes you to a place of rest. Being stillborn is preferable to a life of wickedness, a life of unfulfillment. Now, those are some implicit references. Next week, we're going to look at some explicit references that I think support the fact, not just implicitly but explicitly, that children who die go to heaven. So if we answer yes, what about babies that die, if we say instant salvation, yes, how are we going to understand that in the light of sin? In the light of fallenness?

So I'm going to ask and answer a few questions. I'm going to give you a little theology lesson here. First question: Who qualifies as an infant or a child? Fair enough? People always say, "Well, what's the age of accountability?" That's the way the question is typically answered. I'd like to pose it another way. Who qualifies as an infant or a child? Who are we talking about here? We heard testimonies tonight in the waters of baptism from some young people who were 13, is that the age? Is it 12? Is it 11? Is it 10? I heard from one young lady that she believes that her salvation occurred at the age of 7; another, I think, at the age of 10. What is that age?

And you often hear that question asked. That's really not the question because we're not talking about an age of accountability. Get this in your mind: We're talking about a condition of accountability. Get the word "age" out of this discussion. We're talking about a condition of accountability - not an age. Who qualifies, then, in our discussion as an infant or child who dying is saved, who dying instantly goes to heaven? Who are we talking about? Answer: Those who have not reached sufficient mature understanding in order to comprehend convincingly the issues of law and grace; sin and salvation.

I'll say it again because I thought about it a long time and this is the way I want you to hear it. We're talking about someone who has not reached sufficient mature understanding to comprehend convincingly the issues of law and grace and sin and salvation. This is certainly an infant in the womb. This is certainly an infant at birth. This is certainly a small child. And this is certainly a mentally impaired adult at any age. Anyone in the condition who cannot sufficiently understand and comprehend so as to be fully convinced of the issues of law and grace and sin and salvation. It's not an age - it is a condition.

And from child to child, it varies. And as I said, you have to include in this those who grow up mentally disadvantaged, mentally disabled, mentally retarded, so as never to be able to have a sufficient mature understanding and a convincingly comprehensive grasp of law and grace and sin and salvation. This is not an age, this is a condition. That's who we're talking about, people in that condition where they cannot, in a mature way, understand and comprehend convincingly these issues. We're talking about those people. Are they saved if they die?

And the next question that we have to address in framing up this discussion - and I'm being careful in detail because I want this to be helpful to not only to us but to many people who are asking this question, so I want to be careful to cover everything. A second question: Are all children conceived as sinners? Are all children conceived as sinners?

Now, there is a belief still around - though it was condemned sixteen hundred years ago, there is a belief that teaches that all people are born without sin. They're all born, we're all born, morally clean. Sin only takes root in our lives when we commit our first sin. So we come in morally clean, this view says, and we commit sin by choice, and then when we commit sin by choice, we become sinners and not until. Those who hold this view find it very convenient in dealing with children because they say since these little ones can't make a moral choice to sin, they're therefore not sinners, so when they die, they go to heaven because they're not sinners. They die in sinlessness.

As I said, sixteen hundred years ago, this view (called Pelagianism) was denounced as a heresy by every church that met after the death of Pelagius, and yet it's survived even until today in some forms of what we call Arminian theology. However, the Bible is absolutely crystal clear that all children are sinners from conception - all children. The principle of iniquity is embedded in the human race. Children are born morally corrupt. They are born with an irresistible bent toward evil, and any notion that children are born morally neutral and free from a predisposition to sin is absolutely contrary to Scripture.

And as I said, this view was denounced as heresy after the death of the one who propounded it and has been considered heresy by those faithful to biblical theology ever since. All humans are born in sin. If infants were not sinful, if they were not morally corrupt, then they wouldn't die. If they were born innocent or pure or morally neutral, there would be no basis for their death. The very fact that they die indicates that the disease of sin is there in them because sin is the killer. It is in their inherited sin nature that the seeds of death are planted.

And furthermore, do you know any adult that chose not to sin and therefore perpetuated some holy perfection? Do you know any adult that didn't repeat Adam and Eve's conscious rebellion against God? Do you know any adult that didn't actually sin? No. The only persons who don't actually sin are those who die in infancy, and the only reason they don't actually sin is because they die before they can manifest their sinfulness. They die before they can make a responsible moral choice to rebel against God, which all of them will do if they live.

Any child who lives to the point of moral responsibility, any person who gets beyond that condition where they can't understand and they can't convincingly grasp the truths of salvation, any child who lives past the point of responsible moral - to the point of responsible moral choice will choose to sin. We all do. The Bible is absolutely clear that all infants who survive end up wretched sinners because it's in their nature. First Kings 8:46, "There is no man who doesn't sin." Psalm 51:5, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity; in sin, my mother conceived me." Doesn't mean he was an illegitimate child - that's not the case - but from the very conception, sin was there, embedded in his nature.

Psalm 58:3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb. And those who speak lies go astray from birth." Psalm 143:2, "In thy sight, no one living is righteous." No one living; that is, from conception on, in the womb, at birth, in infancy, in childhood or adulthood, no one is righteous. Proverbs 20 and verse 9, "Who can say I have cleansed my heart, I'm pure from sin?" No one. Ecclesiastes 7 and verse 20, "Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins." Jeremiah

17:9, "The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and who can know it?" Everything in Scripture cries out about the sinfulness of man.

Jesus, in Matthew 15:18, says, "The things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and out of the heart come evil thoughts and murders and adulteries and fornications and thefts and false witness and slanders. These are the things that defile the man." It's what comes from the inside. In Romans chapter 3, "There is none righteous; no, not one." Romans 3 goes on to describe the wretchedness of the human heart.

So the Bible tells us that sinfulness is not a condition that comes upon people when they are old enough to choose to do evil. It is the condition of the entire human race, and every conception brings into being a sinful life. Ever since Adam and Eve, everyone born has been born in a fallen, sinful state. That becomes evident as soon as any behavioral choice is made. We are born sinners. We are also born guilty because we inherit the guilt of Adam's sin. I don't want to go into detail. If you want detail, you can get the teaching that we've done on Romans chapter 5.

But a couple of verses. Romans 5:12, "Just as through one man's sin entered into the world and death through sin, so death spread to all men because all sinned." That is a profoundly definitive statement that says when Adam sinned, the whole human race became guilty in Adam - and we all sinned there and we all died there, and every human that is born bears the guilt of Adam's sin, the principle of iniquity, and death. We are born corrupt, inheriting this defiled human nature and bearing guilt for that original sin. And so in the same chapter, Romans 5:21 it says, "Sin reigned in death from that point on."

All people, then, are born sinners. They are born resisting righteousness and loving evil. We are - this is a very important verse (Ephesians 2:3) - by nature, the children of wrath. That is our nature. Genesis 8:21 says, "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Isaiah 48:8, "I know that thou wouldst deal very treacherously and was called a transgressor from the womb." Now, this is important. Every child is conceived with a deadly virus, the S-I-N virus, with corrupt motives, corrupt attitudes, corrupt desires, corrupt ambitions, corrupt objectives, and bears the guilt of Adam's sin.

So we cannot answer the question by saying all babies die and go to heaven because they're sinless - they're not. They're not. And the very fact that they die proves that they have inherited the corruption of sin that produces death.

That leads us to a third question, and we're getting to the issues now. What implications does this truth of depravity have on the issue of dying infants? We must conclude that all babies are depraved sinners from the time of conception because they're born to depraved parents, and like produces like.

And here is where some people jump in and say, "Well, if they're all sinners, if they're all born in sin, they're all guilty, then they're all damned to hell. And all the little ones who die by the millions and billions because they are sinful deserve death and hell, and that's where they go. And since they can't repent and since they can't cry out to God for mercy and grace, they can't believe in Jesus Christ, they all go to hell." There are people who believe it. There are people who've told me that repeatedly.

This is sort of an implication drawn out of their doctrine of total depravity, that because all who are born are born in total depravity and deserve hell, they get hell. It is supposedly their sequential or logical process moving from the view of total depravity. It was one of the accusations against Spurgeon. Spurgeon was strong on Reformed theology, and people accused Spurgeon - as they have accused others who believe in Reformed theology (or Calvinism, as it's called) - of damning all the babies.

And maybe Spurgeon never responded better than this, he said (quote): "Among the gross falsehoods which have been uttered against the Calvinist proper is the wicked calumny that we hold the damnation of little infants. A baser lie was never uttered. There may have existed somewhere in some corner of the earth a miscreant" - a criminal - "who would dare to say that there were infants in hell, but I have never met with him nor have I met with a man who ever saw such a person. We say, with regard to infants, Scripture saith but little and therefore, where Scripture is confessedly scant, it is for no man to determine dogmatically.

"But I think I speak for the entire body, or certainly with exceedingly few exceptions and those unknown to me, when I say we hold that all infants who die are elect of God and are therefore saved. And we look to this as being the means by which Christ shall see of the travail of his soul to a great degree, and we do sometimes hope that thus the multitude of the saved shall be made to exceed the multitude of the lost. Whatever views our friends may hold upon the point, they are not necessarily connected with Calvinistic doctrine. I believe that the Lord Jesus, who said, 'Of such is the kingdom of heaven,' doth daily and constantly receive into His loving arms those tender ones who are only shown and then snatched away to heaven." End quote.

If you survey Reformed/Calvinistic literature over 450 years since Calvin, you'll find that the vast majority of all the writers believe that all infants who die are taken to heaven. Now, let me kind of expand on that. This is very, very important. You see, it's only pure, true, Reformed soteriology, salvation, only pure, true, Reformed soteriology can account for the fact that fallen, sinful, guilty, depraved children who die with no spiritual merit, die with no religious merit, die with no moral merit of their own can be welcomed by a holy God into eternal glory. Only pure Reformed theology can allow for that because only the purest theology believes that salvation is all by grace. How were you saved? By what? Grace.

You say, "Well, if God just takes all the babies to heaven, that's just grace." Right. But how were you saved? By law? What do you want, law for babies and grace for you? You had no more to do with your salvation than a helpless infant. That's why the truest and purest theology is that theology which understands that salvation is by grace, and maybe that's what Jesus had in mind in part when He said, "You who go to heaven go to heaven as little children." Is there a better illustration of salvation by grace than the salvation of a helpless infant?

True understanding - any true understanding of Scripture yields the reality that all salvation is by sovereign choice by God through grace based on nothing that the sinner merits. And is there a better illustration of that than saving lost infants? Does that magnify sovereignty? Does it magnify grace? Of course it does.

Phil Johnson wrote in one of his lessons, "I met one fellow whose own child died in infancy, and he seemed to think there was something meritorious about believing his own child had gone to hell. Every chance he got, he brought up the issue and boasted about he and his wife had come to grips

with the fact that their child was simply not among the elect. I told him I thought he and his wife were in for a pleasant surprise when they get to glory. I recall that he said he was absolutely certain that if God elected that infant to salvation, He would have kept him alive long enough to bring him to faith.

“My reply was that he would have had just as much biblical warrant to conclude that if God had decided not to elect that child, He would have kept him on earth long enough for the child’s heart to be hardened by sin and his rebellion against God to be manifest through deliberate actions. Because whenever Scripture describes the inhabitants of hell, it always does so with lists of sins and abominations they have deliberately committed.

“We might look at the biblical data and conclude that when God takes the life of a little one, it is actually an act of mercy, keeping that child from being hardened by a life of exposure to evil and a life of deliberate rebellion against God. One’s position on this issue says a lot about one’s view of God” - I like this - “and His grace.”

And if you understand by nature God is a what? Savior - haven’t we said that over and over and over and over? - is not that the truest expression of His heart? Isn’t Jeremiah weeping the tears of God in Jeremiah 13? Isn’t Scripture saying God wants people to be saved, He’s not willing that they perish? How can we believe that if He catapults billions of helpless infants into hell? Is this any magnification of grace? Is this any illustration of grace?

Somebody else will come at this point and say, “Ah, yes, but God is gracious but only to baptized babies.” This is right. This is Lutheranism. Now, we certainly have much to thank Martin Luther for, but infant baptism isn’t one of the things. Luther’s catechism says this (quote): “Baptism worketh forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives everlasting salvation to all who believe as the Word of the promise of God declare.” Well, the baby can’t believe, and that’s where Luther jumped in and said, “Well, surrogate faith on the part of his parents is rendered in his behalf, so baptized babies will be saved.”

The Lutheran Augsburg Confession says (quote): “Of Baptism they teach that it is necessary to salvation, and that through Baptism is offered the grace of God, and that children are to be baptized who by baptism being offered to God are received into God’s favor” (end quote). This view is held by Anglicans and Episcopalians, some Reformed groups.

The Roman Catholic Church essentially teaches the same thing, that the removal of sin depends on the sacrament of infant baptism. Without infant baptism, without baptism, no child can be saved. Council of Trent, 1563, based the salvation of infants on Roman Catholic baptism. In 1951, Pius XII taught that (quote): “No other way besides baptism is seen as imparting the life of Christ to little children.” The new Catholic Catechism says, “By Christian baptism, one enters into the kingdom of God and into the sphere of the saving work of Christ.”

So the answer of the sacramentalists is the baptized babies are saved and the unbaptized babies aren’t. Now, this would make salvation not an act of grace but an act of works. That is no credit to the grace of God. The point must be rejected outright, first of all, since infant baptism isn’t mentioned or taught in Scripture. I remember when I was debating R. C. Sproul on baptism, and he’s my good friend, but he didn’t have a case. So when he asked me if I’d debate him, I said, “In a heartbeat.”

And so after I gave my side of the thing and he gave his, he started out by saying, “Now, MacArthur says infant baptism isn’t in the Bible and he’s right. However” - and off he went. If you’re trying to find infant baptism in the Bible, you’re not going to find it. Infant baptism would certainly be a work, and if babies are saved in that work, then salvation is not by grace.

Let me summarize. No view of infant salvation which denies original sin and total depravity is true. Did you get that? No view of infant salvation which denies original sin and total depravity is true. Babies are not free from sin, they are sinners. Second summary point: No view of universal damnation of infants who die necessarily protects the doctrines of salvation since salvation is grounded in absolute sovereignty and comprehensive grace. All babies saved would be an act of grace apart from any merit on the part of any child, and that is true of adult salvation. And thirdly, no baptism of anyone, including infants, saves them. That would make salvation by works.

What I just said to you, in case you didn’t follow it, is that all babies are depraved, fallen, guilty, corrupt sinners. But sending them all to hell doesn’t necessarily protect the doctrine of salvation since the glory of the doctrine of salvation is that it is a sovereign choice by God provided for unworthy, incapable sinners purely on the basis of grace. That eliminates any work, including baptism.

One more question. If infants are saved when they die, by what means are they saved? If those who are retarded - mentally retarded, mentally disabled, dysfunctional, and therefore in the same category as an infant would be, in the condition of not having a capability to understand matters of salvation - if they are saved when they die, by what means are they saved? By what means? Well, I’ll tell you the means. By the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ because that is the only means that anybody can be saved.

Now, listen to what I say. God has predestined all He wills into salvation, including those in infancy. That salvation is by His sovereign choice through grace alone, though all infants deserve eternal judgment because of their guilt and corruption. Their sins were paid for by the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ on the cross in which He bore the wrath of God not only for all who could believe, but for all who could not believe. I really do believe that only those who understand true Reformed theology can grasp the redemption of little ones, which fits so beautifully because it’s all of sovereignty and it’s all of grace.

B. B. Warfield, the great Princeton theologian, wrote this: “The destiny of infants who die is determined irrespective of their choice by an unconditional decree of God, suspended for its execution on no act of their own. And their salvation is wrought by an unconditional application of the grace of Christ to their souls through the immediate and irresistible operation of the Holy Spirit prior to and apart from any action of their own proper wills. And if death in infancy does depend on God’s providence, it is assuredly God in His providence who selects this vast multitude to be made participants of His unconditional salvation.

“This is but to say that they are unconditionally predestined to salvation from the foundation of the world. If only a single infant dying in irresponsible infancy be saved, the whole Arminian principle is traversed. If all infants dying such are saved, not only the majority of the saved but doubtless the majority of the human race hitherto have entered into life by a non-Arminian pathway.” A little tongue-in-cheek there.

What he is saying is anybody who has an Arminian system has in that system some contribution to salvation made by the individual, that it's partly God and partly us. And that's why he intends to say that it is only a pure understanding of the doctrine of salvation that says it's all of God and all of grace that can account for the salvation of these little ones. And I quickly add that that salvation is not apart from Christ, it is through Christ. He, as Warfield says, is the bearer of their sins in His own body on the cross.

You say, "But - but - but - but - but they didn't believe, they didn't believe." They couldn't believe - they couldn't believe. And so in grace and mercy and sovereign election through the sacrifice of Christ and His resurrection freely applied to them, they are ushered into God's kingdom. And, of course, Scripture nowhere teaches infant damnation, and I'll show you next time how it teaches the opposite.

And I want to close with this. What does Scripture teach about damnation? Turn to Revelation chapter 20. This is important. This is the main point that I want you to get in this message tonight. Revelation chapter 20, Scripture teaches - listen very carefully. Scripture teaches - and here's a summary statement I'm going to show you how it comes through Scripture, teaches that men and women are saved by what? Grace. But damned by works - by works. Scripture teaches that all condemned sinners earn their eternal punishment by their sins.

How do I know that? Because whenever you go to the judgment seat, this is what you see, Revelation 20, verses 11 and 12. Here's the great white throne, this is the final judgment of all the ungodly of all history, and the One sitting upon the throne (from whose presence earth and heaven fled away and no place was found for them) obviously, the great Judge. God has committed that judgment to Christ, it tells us in John 5. There is Christ, the great Judge, on the throne.

And verse 12, "I saw the dead, the great, the small standing before the throne, and books were opened. And another book was opened which was the book of life, and the dead were judged" - listen to this - "from the things which were written in the books according to their deeds and the sea gave up the dead which were in it and death and hades gave up the dead which were in them and they were judged every one of them according to their" - what? - "deeds" (or works).

I'm going to say this again. Scripture always, always connects eternal condemnation to the sinner's deeds, works - always. In John 8:21 and 24, the most significant damning work, Jesus says, "Because you believe not in me, you will die in your sins; and where I go, you'll never come." The greatest of all the sinner's evil works is unbelief - unbelief. And unbelief is always singled out as the primary damning sin. John 3:36, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life. He who doesn't obey the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God abides on him."

Earlier in the chapter, He says, "You don't believe" - you don't believe, and because you don't believe, you're condemned. You're condemned if you don't believe. And when you don't believe, you don't obey. So there's a life of evil works that are recorded, the books record it. God has a complete record of every sin of every sinner who has ever lived, and it is on the basis of those records that they will be condemned. It is the sins that sinners commit that constitute the record that is established against them by which condemnation falls from the throne of God.

Little children don't have that record. In Jonah 4:11, "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who don't know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?" There are people there, God says, who deserve compassion because they don't know the difference, they don't know the difference between their right and left hand. He's speaking of those who are infants or those who are mentally incapable of understanding truth. And God says they deserve compassion because of that condition.

In Deuteronomy 1:39, God talks about your little ones who have no knowledge of good or evil. There is a point in life when you don't have the knowledge of good or evil, you haven't reached that condition of accountability. Similarly, in Isaiah 7:16, "Before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good," and so forth.

Infants who die, then, have never had anything written in the record because they've never committed the deeds, conscious deeds of rebellion and iniquity. God knows at what point they become accountable. Infants who die have been protected by God's providence from committing those deeds, those responsible acts of sin by which they would be condemned. And listen, there is no place in the Bible where judgment is based on any other grounds than the deeds of sin. It's true they're sinful by nature, but the account against them that condemns them is their deeds. God doesn't charge people with actual sins until they commit them.

Now, listen. Salvation, then, is by grace - completely apart from works. Damnation is by works - completely apart from grace. Infants have no sinful works to fill the books and condemn them. So I say this: If a baby dies, that baby is elect. Instant heaven. Now you know why I answered Larry's question the way I did.

Let me read you something in closing - written in 1907 by R. A. Webb - listen to this. "If a dead infant were sent to hell on no other account than that of original sin, there would be a good reason to the divine mind for the judgment because sin is a reality. But the child's mind would be a perfect blank as to the reason of its suffering. Under such circumstances, it would know suffering but it would have no understanding of the reason for its suffering. It could not tell itself why it was so awfully smitten; and, consequently, the whole meaning and significance of its sufferings being to it a conscious enigma, the very essence of the penalty would be absent and justice would be disappointed, cheated of its validation." End quote.

Yes, children are born sinners - their death proves that. But never being able to understand the truth and therefore consciously reject it and choose rebellion, they have no record against them in the books of God and they, then, constitute a marvelous and vast opportunity for sovereign grace to operate apart from any works at all.

So here's a final summary. All children who die before they reach the condition of accountability by which they convincingly understand their sin and corruption and embrace the gospel by faith are graciously saved eternally by God through the work of Jesus Christ, being elect by sovereign choice, innocent of willful sin, rebellion, and unbelief by which works they would be justly condemned to eternal punishment. (Get the tape if you want that again.) So when an infant dies, he or she is elect to eternal salvation and eternal glory.

So, dear one, if you have a little one that dies, rejoice. Count not your human loss, count your

eternal gain. Count not that child as having lost, but having gained, having passed briefly through this life, untouched by the wicked world, only to enter into eternal glory and grace. The true sadness should be over those children of yours who live and reject the gospel. Don't sorrow over your children in heaven, sorrow over your children on earth, that they should come to Christ. This is your great responsibility, your great opportunity.

Father, thank you again tonight for these dear people, how they love your truth. How my heart is filled with love toward them for that fellowship in the Word that we embrace and enjoy. How I thank you for their eager hearts to know, to apply, and to proclaim the truth.

I thank you for every little life that has passed through this congregation, every little life that was miscarried and passed in to your eternal presence through the election of sovereign grace, every little life that died around the time of birth, some of them held in the tender arms of a mom and a dad in a time of sorrow and yet rejoicing for that little one that passed through the world without the burden of sin.

Thank you for every parent for every little one that lived for months or years and then was snatched away, taken into eternal rest, awaiting reunion, in many cases with parents they never could know but shall forever enjoy. And for those children who lived a few years and died through an illness or an accident and were gathered into your eternal arms, we thank you as well.

You are a God who by nature saves, you show us that in so many ways. And this exhibit of sovereign grace is massive evidence of your compassion on sinners. You have saved those who have no ability to remedy the sin they've inherited and must be cast upon your mercy.

And so it is that you save us the same way - only for us, you impart conviction, repentance, and faith in your Son who was our Savior and the Savior of all the little ones who die. For this great grace, for this rescue - particularly from pagan countries, idolatrous and godless societies - we praise you, we thank you, and we glorify you for this abundant grace. In our Savior's name. And everybody said: Amen.

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The Salvation of Babies Who Die, Part 2

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 80-243

This is Part Two of a subject that I began last Sunday night, "The Salvation of Babies Who Die." I'm very thankful and gratified for the response that I have received to Part One. Last Sunday night, when I finished the message, there were certainly three or four (maybe five or six) sets of parents who came up to me and thanked me for the message because they had recently lost little ones. Some after the majority of the pregnancy period, some at birth, some a little while after birth, some after a few months, some even after a couple of years, and they all expressed their gratitude for now having the confidence to believe that the eternal destiny of their little ones who died is settled and that they are in heaven with the Lord.

I was at a medical conference this last few days, just got back last night. This question came up because these are medical people who work in third world countries where they see a lot of death, childhood death, infant death. And I was talking to one neonatal nurse, a nurse who works in a very difficult situation with preemies, who never really knew what to tell parents about what happens when the little ones die. Her joy was almost overwhelming when I explained to her what I believe the Bible teaches about their salvation. And so from an anecdotal or a very personal perspective, this is an important matter - very important matter to the parents who are here tonight should one of their little ones die.

Beyond the personal and the anecdotal and the individual, there is the reality that millions - even billions - through human history of human beings have been conceived and died before they ever reached a condition of accountability, before they could ever understand law and grace and sin and salvation, before they could ever consciously reject the truth. What is their eternal destiny? Well, the Scripture weighs very heavily on the fact that they are received into heaven as redeemed souls to live forever with God.

Last Sunday night, I endeavored to show you from the theological side why this is true. Tonight, I want to show you from the textual side the support for that. Now, just briefly to recap what I said last week to sort of get you in the flow, we asked the question: Who are we referring to when we talk about these infants, these little ones, these children who die and are saved? And the answer is this: Those who have not reached sufficient mature understanding to comprehend convincingly the issues of sin and salvation.

And let me say, as a footnote, that does not apply to the heathen. Adult heathen are caught up in the Romans 1 passage, when they know God, they glorify Him not as God, become empty in their imaginations, create their own gods and worship the creature more than the Creator. We're not talking about them, we're talking about those who have not reached sufficient mature understanding to comprehend the issues of sin and salvation. I told you there is no age of accountability, but there is a condition of accountability, and it is true for children and it is true for some adults who are mentally retarded or handicapped.

Second question we addressed - and this is quick review: Are all such souls conceived as sinners? Are they guilty before God and worthy of death? And the answer is yes. The Bible is very clear that all are sinners, that we are conceived in iniquity, that we are wicked from the point of conception because we bear the guilt of Adam's sin and we bear the fallenness of Adam's nature passed down to us. All who are conceived, from the moment of conception, possess within them the power of sin, it is in their humanness. And they bear guilt before God.

If infants were not sinful, if they were morally neutral, there would be, then, no basis for them to die because it is the wages of sin that is death. It is their inherited sin nature that plants in them the seeds of death. And for most who are conceived, it makes survival at least as (if not more) difficult than life. Avoiding death seems to be harder than just living. From the time of conception, there are so many things that threaten that life.

Since it is true that all those that are conceived are depraved sinners, what implications does that truth of depravity have on dying children and their salvation? Well, it makes their salvation solely a matter of sovereign grace. They don't deserve to be saved because they are guilty sinners by inheritance. If they are saved, it is by the sovereign grace of God, based on nothing that they can do, nothing they can achieve and nothing they can merit. The salvation of those souls, then, is absolutely consistent with the salvation of adults, which is also based on sovereign grace apart from anything that they can do.

And the fourth question we asked: By what means are infants saved when they die in a condition prior to accountability? And the answer: They are saved through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ, His death for them, because He bore the wrath of God for them as for all who could and would believe. They're saved, then, by grace, by sovereign grace.

The only difference between their salvation and ours is faith is a part of ours - it's not a part of theirs. But then again, faith isn't something we contribute, faith is a gift from God. So they are saved by grace in sovereign election so that the work of Christ is freely applied to them. Ours is justification by faith, theirs is justification without faith. Because without the knowledge and ability to understand convincingly sin and salvation, they cannot exercise that faith.

We also ended last time by saying Scripture nowhere teaches infant damnation. Nowhere. What Scripture does teach (according to Revelation chapter 20, verses 11 and 12, remember) is that all the people who are sent to hell forever are sent there based upon a record that God has kept and it's a record of their what? Their sins, Revelation 20:11 and 12.

The dominant sin they commit is unbelief. Unbelief. Tied to that unbelief is a rejection of their true condition and a rejection of God's provision. So they are guilty of a failure to recognize their own sinful condition and a failure to believe what God has revealed to them - whether in the case of a heathen who needs to believe the revelation that God has placed in creation and conscience or whether someone has actually heard the gospel and rejected that. It is their rejection and unbelief that is the dominating and damning sin, but their judgment comes about based upon the record of the consequent sins to their willful unbelief.

Children don't fit into that category. It is true they sin. Little ones sin. Little children disobey, they're

selfish, they're angry, et cetera, but they are incapable of understanding the moral essence of that sin. They are incapable of understanding God. And they are incapable of understanding the gospel. They are incapable of exercising a true repentance toward God and a saving faith so that they are with excuse. Whereas the pagans in Romans 1 are without excuse because they are capable of knowing and understanding the revelation God has given them in creation and conscience and they are capable of faith, and so unbelief for them is a willful choice.

And so, in sort of summing that up from last time, all who die without reaching the condition of accountability are graciously forgiven and saved by God through the work of Jesus Christ, being elect by sovereign grace and innocent of willful rebellion and unbelief against God and, therefore, accumulating a life of sinful works by which they would be justly condemned to eternal punishment. That's what we framed for you in our last message.

Now, I want to go to some supporting Scripture because I want you to understand how the Bible speaks to this issue. This is very helpful material. I've never really in the past - although I know what I believed and I've hit on it here and there, I've never done so much reading and pulled so much together of my own thinking, which I'll try to distill down and give you a portion of.

I want us to look at the Old Testament and the New Testament - okay? - and each of those under three headings: innocence, ownership and salvation. And those are not particularly brilliant categories, they're just simple ways we can split the material down. We'll look at the Old Testament and we'll look at the category of innocence, then the category of ownership, and then the category of salvation. We'll do the same with the New Testament. I think you'll find this very, very revealing.

We'll start in the Old Testament. And what we're looking for in the Old Testament is passages that indicate that these little ones are, before God, innocent; that is, that they do not have culpability for which divine judgment is the just punishment. Let's go back to Deuteronomy chapter 1, and obviously, I can't go through everything around these passages, but we're going to really kind of laser in on the key statements that are made because we need to cover a number of these.

Deuteronomy chapter 1, verse 39. Obviously, we're in the context of Israel's history and as is replete throughout Israel's history, they sinned against the Lord, as verse 41 says. Verse 37 says the Lord is angry with them. Verse 39, Deuteronomy 1, "Moreover, your little ones, who you said would become a prey and your sons, who this day have no knowledge of good or evil, shall enter there. And I will give it to them, and they shall possess it."

Let me give you the picture here. They're ready to go into the land. They've come out of Egypt, they're ready to go into the land of promise. And God says to them, "I'm angry with you. You sinned." And I don't need to go through the litany of sins that they committed while they were in the wilderness, including the golden calf, the sins of unbelief regarding the spies, going into the land and the people not believing.

But what you need to understand here is God basically said to them you're not going in the land, you're not going in because of your willful rebellion, because of your willful sin. But your little ones who you said would become a prey if you went in and took the land, even though I told you I would fight for you and with you, your little ones who this day have no knowledge of good or evil, they'll go in and I'll give it to them and they'll possess it. And what God is saying is your rebellion - your

rebellion causes you to forfeit this blessing. I'll give it to them because they don't bear the same culpability that you do.

It is not to say that they were not depraved - all who are born are depraved - but because they had no true understanding, no knowledge of good or evil - in a simple way, they knew what their parents told them to do and they knew if they did it or didn't do it, but they had no true understanding regarding sin and righteousness. They had no true understanding of their condition or God's remedy to that condition. They had no true understanding of rebellion and unbelief. God says, "So because they really don't know good or evil the way you do, you won't get that land and they will." And in a sense, God blessed their innocence.

Turn to Jeremiah 19:4. "Because they have forsaken me and made this an alien place and have burned sacrifices in it to other gods" - again, you know the story of Jeremiah, you know that God called Jeremiah to be a prophet and Jeremiah to come and speak of the judgment, the exile of Jerusalem, the judgment that was going to fall upon Judah, the southern kingdom, and Jerusalem, we know it as the Babylonian captivity, and this is just a rehearsal of the same thing. They have forsaken me, they have made this an alien place. In other words, they've made it a place of idolatry. They've burned sacrifices in it to other gods.

"Neither they nor their forefathers nor the kings of Judah had ever known, because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent." Now, who are the innocent? Well, the best understanding of this passage is that it's a referral to the sacrifice of babies because in the next verse, they built the high places of Ba-al (or Baal) to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Ba-al, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever enter my mind." You burned your babies - you remember, passing the children through the fire of Molech.

But the thing that I note here is that these are called innocent - innocent. You burn the innocent. God viewed them as innocent, even though they - they're not baptized babies of quote/unquote believing parents, these are the children of idolaters. They would be outside the faith of Israel, even though they would be Jewish people. They would be outside the will of God. They would be essentially pagan Jews who were worshiping idols, burning their babies. And even the burned babies of idolaters are viewed here as innocent. That is God's assessment of them.

Turn to the little prophet, Jonah - Jonah - and this is another just an interesting insight into the innocents issue of the little ones. Jonah chapter 4, it's the last chapter, the last verse of Jonah, the eleventh verse of the fourth chapter. God wanted Jonah to go to Nineveh, as you know, and preach and he did, but Jonah hated it because he hated to see Gentiles sort of adopting his God because he hated Gentiles. That was kind of the way it was, and they didn't really want to include them. Jonah wanted Nineveh, frankly, just wiped out. He would have been happy if God had just destroyed the whole city.

And so God told Jonah that that wasn't appropriate in chapter 4, verse 11. "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?" "Those animals, even, are creatures that I have made. And the beasts of the field shall give me honor," He said in Isaiah.

But what about the 120,000 persons who don't know the difference between their right and their left hand? This is referring to the little ones, the children, to the mentally retarded or handicapped. Am I just going to go in there and obliterate 120,000 people who really don't know the difference in what they do?

You see here that God has restrained His judgment on Nineveh for the express reason that it isn't just to bring that destruction wholesale against those who are, in the words of Jeremiah 19:4, innocent. So you can see in the Old Testament there are passages (and I haven't given you all of them, there are others) that do indicate this matter of innocence to be a reality.

The second is the issue of ownership - ownership - which goes a little beyond innocents. Innocence is just a categoric definition; ownership personalizes it with God, and I'll show you this from a number of Old Testament passages.

Jeremiah chapter 1 - Jeremiah chapter 1. Here, we have Jeremiah introducing himself as the son of Hilkiyah and one of the priests in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. "The Word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah, the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign, came also in the days of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, and the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month," and this is the whole thing leading up to exile.

And then verse 4. "Now, the Word of the Lord came to me, saying" - here's the first message that Jeremiah ever got. "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I consecrated you. I have appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

Now, this is consistent with Psalm 139. In Psalm 139, I read to you last time - and I won't go back over it - but I think you will remember Psalm 139 because it is so unique, where David says, "You formed me from my inward parts, you wove me in my mother's womb. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in secret, skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance, and in your book, they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there wasn't one of them."

That's very parallel to this. God says not only do I deem you at that point as innocent, but I knew you then, you were a person then, and you were known to me then. Not only did I know you, but I had already set you apart for that determination that you would be a prophet. You were mine even then.

In Ezekiel chapter 16, another remarkable statement that expands one's understanding of what I just read. You might say, "Well, that's reserved for a prophet, that's reserved for a prophet." Well, it's also what David said was true about him. "Well," you say, "those are special people. Jeremiah is a special person. David's a special person. Maybe the Lord knows them in a special way. Maybe He has saving intent toward them. And after all, they grew to adulthood and they believed."

But it's much broader than that. Verse 15 of Ezekiel 16, this is a terrible indictment of Jerusalem - terrible indictment. Amazing chapter, really. Verse 15, "You trusted in your beauty, you played the harlot. Because of your fame, you played the harlotries and every passerby who might be willing. You prostituted yourself with every idolater that passed by. You took some of your clothes made for

yourself, high places of various colors, played the harlot on them which should never come about nor happen.” This is a very graphic picture. He pictures Israel like an unfaithful woman.

And after all that God had done for her, picked her up. Back in verse 4. On the day of your birth, your navel cord wasn't cut, you weren't washed with water for cleansing, you weren't rubbed with salt, which is what they did to reduce any infection. You weren't wrapped in cloths, nobody took care of you, you were just thrown in a field. That's what He says about Israel. You just were thrown in a field.

But I picked you up and I washed you and I cleaned you and I dressed you and I multiplied you. Verse 7. You grew up, you became tall, you were well formed and I passed by you and saw you and behold, you were at the time for love. You reached your maturity, and I spread my skirt over you and covered your nakedness, and I swore to you and entered into a covenant with you, you became mine.

This is God saying you became my nation, I brought you out of Egypt and I picked you up in the middle of a field and I cleaned you up and I made you my bride and I bathed you and I washed you and I anointed you and now you're a harlot, now you're a prostitute. Now you dress with prostitutes' clothes and you go out in the middle of the streets and you play the harlot with everybody.

In verse 20, “You took your sons and daughters whom you had borne to me, and you sacrificed them to idols to be devoured.” Here they are again, burning up their babies. And then verse 21, “You slaughtered” - whose children? - “my children.” Underline “my.” You slaughtered my children. You offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through the fire. You can't do that with my children. My children. That's a broad and general statement, my children.

Turn to Job. Again, we looked at this briefly last time, but it fits in here. Job 3. Job is in trouble - you know that. Whatever could go wrong, did. Chapter 2, verse 9, his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.” Just curse God and die. Can't get any worse than this. God can't be any harder on you than He's been. Just curse God and die.

Job didn't listen to his wife. Verse 10 says, “In all this, Job did not sin with his lips.” But he did - he did show us his pain. Verse 11, “Why did I not die at birth? Just come out of the womb and die. Why did those knees receive me? And why the breasts that I should suck? For now I would have lain down and been quiet, I would have slept then. I would have been at rest with kings and with counselors of the earth and princes.”

What he is saying here is I would have been better off if I had been stillborn, verse 16, it would have been better to be a miscarriage. It would have been better to be an infant that never saw the light. Because verse 17 says, there, if that were true of me, I would be in a place where there's no wickedness and where the weary are at rest. This is the most righteous man on the planet at that time, the most righteous man. Verse 8 of chapter 1, there's no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.

This is God's man, this is a man with a sound theology and a sound faith and he says, frankly, life is so bad, I would be far better off if I had been stillborn, if I had been miscarried, because then I would have been at rest. You're not talking about annihilation because he said, “I would be with kings

and counselors and with princes,” “I would be with people, I would be with those who are at rest.” This is not annihilation. And it certainly can’t be hell because if there’s one thing true about hell, it is that there is no rest. Certainly if he’s going to be in hell, he wouldn’t cease from wickedness. The only possibility is heaven.

So you see in the Old Testament there are texts that indicate to us the innocent condition. That is not that they are not depraved, not that they are not possessors of a sin nature and bear the culpability of Adam’s sin, but that there is no willful unbelief, rebellion and sinful behavior, which can be held against them because they do not convincingly grasp those issues. They are innocent.

More than that, the verses that I’ve just read you indicate that they are in a special way God’s. Even the children of pagan idolaters being offered on sacrificial altars are “my children.” And they are so much God’s that should they be miscarried, they go to a place where they’re with others at rest and free from wickedness.

But there’s even more. You can go from innocence to ownership to salvation in the Old Testament. Turn to 2 Samuel, this is most helpful. Second Samuel chapter 12. Second Samuel chapter 12, you know the story. This is David and Bathsheba, an infamous incident in which David committed adultery with a woman who was not his wife and, in order to continue that relationship in an ongoing way, made sure that her husband, Uriah, was killed. So David was not only an adulterer, he was a murderer. Chapter 12 and verse 12 is a good place to start.

Now, David had done his sin secretly, but the Lord is going to do something before all of Israel and under the sun. So David said to Nathan, “I’ve sinned against the Lord.” Nathan said to David, “The Lord also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.” David was penitent, Psalm 32, Psalm 51 are his penitent prayers. God forgave him. “However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, you’ve destroyed your testimony, the child also that is born to you shall surely die.” The child is going to die. Bathsheba conceived a child, that child was born, that child was going to die.

Verse 15. So Nathan went to his house, Nathan was the prophet. “Then the Lord struck the child that Uriah’s widow bore to David so that he was very sick.” The little baby got sick. I think David really wanted that little baby to live because if the baby lived, it would sort of be a token of forgiveness and grace. But God had forgiven him. He wasn’t about to overdo it and David needed a severe lesson and so did everybody else who watched the situation. But David wanted the child to live, and I’m sure, like any father, David had a tenderness toward that little child. And so, in verse 16, “David therefore inquired of God for the child.”

He was so serious, he fasted. Went and lay all night on the ground. He prostrated himself on the ground, didn’t eat, all night long, begged God to save his baby. “And the elders of his household stood beside him in order to raise him up from the ground, but he was unwilling and wouldn’t eat food with them.” All the people who cared for David surrounded him and said, “You’ve got to get up and you’ve got to eat.” He wouldn’t do either. This is a man in profound, intense pain and prayer.

Verse 18. It happened on the seventh day that the child died. The servants of David were afraid to tell him. The implication here is he stayed that way over a period of seven days. We don’t know if it was the whole seven days or every night during the seven days or what portion of it, but for seven

days, he went through this fasting and this mourning and this intercession on behalf of the child in a position of proneness or prostrate on the ground. And they were afraid to tell him that the child was dead. “For they said, ‘Behold, while the child was still alive, we spoke to him and he didn’t listen to our voice. How, then, can we tell him the child is dead, since he might do himself harm?’”

They saw him so wrought with pain, suffering so profoundly over the anticipated death of this child that they were afraid that if they told him the child was dead, he might take his own life. In their minds, he had attached his entire sense of wellbeing to the life of that child. “We just can’t tell him, he’s liable to do something to himself, harm himself.” Verse 19, “But when David saw his servants were whispering together, David perceived the child was dead.”

Now, this is seven days of praying and fasting and prone all night, pleading with God, so intense that the servants are afraid to even tell him the child is dead for fear that he might take his own life. They read how serious he was, emotional. So David said to his servants, “Is the child dead?” They said, “He’s dead.” Amazing. Verse 20, David arose from the ground, which leads me to believe he’d been there for seven days, the most - maybe the most intense example of prayer in the Old Testament. He arose from the ground, washed, and anointed himself.

What that essentially means is cleaned up, you know, put on his - whatever perfume he used, whatever he put in his hair, combed it, changed his clothes, which indicated that he very likely hadn’t for seven days, and he came into the house of the Lord and he did what? He worshiped. What’s going on here? He didn’t kill himself. He took a bath. He cleaned up. He went into the house of the Lord and he worshiped. And then he came to his house and he said, “Hey, guys, I’m hungry.” So they set before him food and what did he do? He ate. And you’re saying, “This is an amazing transformation.”

And the servants, in verse 21, said to him, “What is this thing that you’ve done? We don’t get it. While the child was alive, you fasted and wept. And when the child died, you got up and ate.” Seems backwards. “Well,” he said, “while the child was still alive, I fasted and wept for I said, ‘Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me that the child may live.’” That’s normal - isn’t it? - to pray for the life of the child. “I wanted the life of that child, I cherished the life of that child, I wanted that little one. I wanted the life of that little one.

“Even though born of sin, I wanted to love that child and to raise that child and enjoy that child and so I prayed. And I said, ‘Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me that the child may live. I don’t know.’ He’s very much like us, isn’t he? He just prayed that God would be gracious, but he didn’t know what God would choose to do. “But” - verse 23 - “now that he has died, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? No. But” - here it is - “I shall go to him.”

Isn’t that a great statement? It’s a parting but it’s only temporary. “I’ll go to him, but he will not return to me.” Nothing to pray for, guys. Nothing to fast about, guys. He can’t come back, but I’m going to him. His sorrow was instantaneously replaced by hope when that child died. This is a man of God in spite of his sins. Face down on the floor for seven days, mourning and fasting and praying with grief, his sorrow so great that the servants think that he might even take his own life.

To their shock, when he finds out the baby has died, he stops weeping, gets up, washes, puts on clean clothes and eats and says, “Nothing to be sad about, gentlemen. I shall go to him.” David was

a believer. David sinned. David was chastened. And David was forgiven. He was God's child. So we know David wasn't saying, "I'll meet him in hell." Some people say, "Well, all he meant was he was going to be buried in the same field." Come on. That's not going to make you clean up and eat. I'm happy that I'll be lying next to him when I'm dead? Some say, "Well, that child went to hell because he was born of adultery." No child - no one - pays for the sins of a parent. Ezekiel 18 makes that absolutely clear.

There's only one answer to this whole thing, and that is that David knew where the child was and he knew there would be a reunion. And here's the key: David knew where he was going. It was David who said, "I will be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness." David knew where he was going. He was going into the presence of God. There was no question about that in David's mind. He knew when he died where he would go. Psalm 16, "Thou wilt not abandon my soul to the grave, to Sheol; neither wilt thou allow thy holy one to undergo decay. Thou wilt make known to me the path of life. In thy presence is fullness of joy. In thy right hand there are pleasures forever."

David knew he was going into the presence of God where there was eternal joy and eternal pleasure, and if he said, "I shall go to him," then he knew where that child was. And David it was who gave us the incredibly wonderful Twenty-third Psalm in which David said, "Surely goodness and lovingkindness shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Where do you think he thought the little one was? In the house of the Lord, and that's why there wasn't any reason to fast and that's why there wasn't any reason to weep. Clean up - he's with the Lord - and you'll be there, too, soon.

Now I want you to turn a few chapters over to 2 Samuel 18 because I want to show you a contrast. This wasn't the only child David had. He had another son whose name, Absalom, is associated with distastefulness, Absalom. Absalom was an adult son, a grown son. Now, you remember that Absalom tried to pull a coup on his father - that's the worst, isn't it? Your own son leading a revolution? I mean it was a real tangled mess - you can read the prior chapters. David was cursed and all kinds of things. And Absalom was running around the country, trying to gather a band of soldiers to himself to go and knock off the palace.

He actually developed a conspiracy and chased David right out of Jerusalem. Here's his own son trying to kill his father. And this is the worst of sons, this is no tender little baby held in the arms, this is a wicked, wretched, ugly, selfish, murderous, plotting, conspiring son. This is a father's worst nightmare. Wretched son, sought to kill his father. He came after him to that effect. However, we find in chapter 18 that Absalom ran into a problem, literally. Verse 9, he was riding on his mule, the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak, and his head caught fast in the oak.

Folks, if you're riding a horse through the woods, duck before the tree appears. Absalom didn't duck, and his head wedged in a "V" in the tree, and he was hanging there, and the mule kept going. And somebody saw it and told Joab, who was with David. "I saw Absalom hanging in an oak." Joab said to the man who told him, "Now, behold, you saw him? Why, then, did you not strike him there to the ground? And I would have given you ten pieces of silver and a belt." Every man needs a belt.

The man, we don't know who he is, the man said to Joab, "Even if I should receive a thousand pieces of silver in my hand, I'm not going to put my hand against the king's son." Do you think I'm going to kill the king's son? I don't know how the king is going to react to that. "For in our hearing, the king charged you and Abishai and Ithai, saying, 'Protect for me the young man Absalom.'"

“Protect him, protect him” - you know, it’s so ridiculous. You think about the story, David was always saying, “Oh, don’t let any harm come to Absalom.” Everybody around David is saying, “You’ve got to be crazy, the guy’s trying to kill you, he’s leading a coup against you, he’s conspiring and plotting against you, and you’re going around saying, ‘Oh, please protect him, please protect him, don’t let anything happen to Absalom.’”

So this poor man says, “I don’t care how much money you give me, I’m not going to kill Absalom. King finds out I’ve killed Absalom, I got some problems.” So in verse 15, Joab had a plan. He got ten young men to kill Absalom so they could sort of spread the blame, and they killed him.

Now, verse 32, Cushite messenger comes and David says to him, “Hey, how’s Absalom? How’s Absalom? Is it well with Absalom?” And the Cushite answered, “Let the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up against you for evil be as that young man.” May everybody else who’s against you be like Absalom. Well, he knew what he meant. May all your enemies be killed the way he was killed. Now here’s a second son who’s dead. “And the king was deeply moved. He went to the chamber over the gate and” - he what? - “he wept. And he said as he walked, ‘O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom. Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son.’”

“Then it was told Joab” - chapter 19 - “Behold, the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom.” This is the exact opposite. He stopped mourning when the baby died; he started mourning when Absalom died. What’s the difference? He knew the baby was in the presence of the Lord; he knew Absalom was not. In that first son, there was hope of a reunion; in the second, there was horror. No sorrow for the death of the first; almost unrelieved sorrow in the death of the second.

First Kings chapter 14 - 1 Kings chapter 14 - this is another one of these very important passages that speaks to the very issue, not of innocence or ownership, but of actually being with God in heaven, being protected by God from judgment. King Jeroboam was very wicked. King Jeroboam did what a lot of other kings did, he - well, he just multiplied idols. He had all kinds of false gods, false priests. He was an idolatrous king. And he really kind of - sort of duplicated the worship of the golden calf that the Jews had sort of invented at Mount Sinai during the Exodus.

And it was under Jeroboam also that they offered their children on the altar to their idols, so because of this wickedness God says to Jeroboam, “Your dynasty is cursed.” Pick it up at verse 10. God says you’ve made your - verse 9 - you know, you’ve done more evil than everybody before you, you’ve gone and made for yourself other gods, molten images to provoke me to anger. You’ve cast me behind your back, so behold - verse 10 - I’m bringing calamity on the house of Jeroboam. I’ll cut off from Jeroboam every male person. They’re all going to die, bond and free, in Israel. I’ll make a clean sweep of the house of Jeroboam as one sweeps away dung until it is all gone.

Pretty severe language. The dynasty of Jeroboam is to be eliminated. Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city, the dogs will eat. The great desecration in society was not to have a proper burial. Anybody in the house of Jeroboam who dies, any male - and they’re all going to die - leave in the streets for the dogs to eat. Only in modern times have dogs been domesticated, they were always curs, they were always scavengers, sort of wild, eating whatever they could in the streets.

“He who dies in the field, the birds of the heavens will eat.” Let the vultures tear their bodies up. Don’t bury anybody from the house of Jeroboam. Let it be made known that God has placed a curse upon them in that fashion. “Now you arise” - verse 12 - “go to your house. When your feet enter the city, the child will die.” There’s a little child in his family. “And all Israel shall mourn for him” - look at this - “and bury him, for he alone of Jeroboam’s family shall come to the grave” - listen to this next statement - “because in him, something good was found toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam.”

This is a little child in the language, the original language. Every male in your family is going to be desecrated, eaten by dogs or vultures, but that little child is to have a decent, respectful burial. Why? Because in him there, is something good toward the Lord God of Israel. And what is that good? It’s not righteous merit, but it is this: He was the only one who had not knowingly, willfully rebelled against God. It’s a wonderful text, isn’t it? God says you treat that little life right - something good in that life. Not enough to earn salvation, but there’s no willful rebellion against me. Another indication, God’s special favor, care toward the little ones.

Turn to the New Testament - the New Testament. Romans 1 - and this is brief. Romans 1. “For the wrath of God” - verse 18. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” - here it is, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, and here’s a further definition - “who suppress” - what? - “the truth in unrighteousness.” Divine judgment comes on those who suppress the truth, which then surfaces the question: Can divine judgment, the wrath of God, fall upon one who cannot either understand or suppress the truth?

Verse 19, “The judgment of God” - the wrath of God - “comes because that which is known about God is evident within them, for God made it evident to them through reason,” as we learned in chapter 2 also, through conscience. “And they can see through the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power, His divine nature which has been so clearly seen that they are literally without excuse.

“And then when they knew God, they didn’t honor Him as God, they weren’t thankful, they became empty in their speculation. Their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools. They exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man, of birds, and four-footed animals and creeping things and therefore, God gave them up.”

Well, that’s not true of infants. They didn’t suppress the truth in unrighteousness. They don’t know the evidence of God that is within them in reason and conscience. They can’t see His eternal power, divine nature, invisible attributes in the creation. They can’t understand those things that are invisible by what is visible to them so that they are without excuse. They are with excuse. This passage, then, in sort of a backhanded way delivers infants from the wrath of God, reserved for those who suppress the truth.

And that’s what pagans do all over the face of the earth. They have the truth in conscience, they have the truth in reason, they suppress it. If they didn’t, if they cried out to God to know more, believe me, God has no limits on His ability to get the gospel to them. But what is clearly seen to a mature person is not clearly seen to one who is a child. And then a word about ownership in the New Testament. Luke 1, just a brief comment here. Luke 1, that’s about innocence, this is about ownership.

Luke 1, it speaks of John the Baptist, and it says, "He'll be great in the sight of the Lord and will drink no wine or liquor and will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb." Here again is this same idea that we saw with Jeremiah, that when - and with David in Psalm 139, that here is an individual in the womb known to God, who belongs to God, who is filled with the Holy Spirit of God even in his mother's womb.

And then over in verse 39, same chapter, Mary meets with Elizabeth, and this child in the womb of Elizabeth (John the Baptist, of whom I just read). She hears Mary's greeting, the baby leaps in her womb, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit, cries with a loud voice, said, "Blessed among women are you and blessed is the fruit of your womb. How has it happened to me that the mother of my Lord shall come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy." So here is John, a prophet, when he can't speak, he just jumps in there, sending messages to his mother. This is simply to point out to us that God has absolute control from the womb of every life.

Galatians 1:15 is another one, the apostle Paul indicating that this is ownership. God owns that little life in that womb, whether it's David or whether it's Jeremiah or whether it's John the Baptist or whether it's the apostle Paul. Galatians 1:15, "When He who had set me apart" - listen to this - "even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace," et cetera, "was pleased to reveal His Son in me," and so forth. God revealed to Paul that he was chosen by God, he was the special possession of God when he was still in his mother's womb. He was as known to God as every other soul conceived in the womb.

He belonged to God as do all, that's why they're called "my children" as we saw in Ezekiel, and when these little ones die in that condition, I believe they are the special care of the Lord. That's why it can say in Romans 5:18, "By Adam's sin, many were made sinners; through Christ, many are made righteous." I know it's a narrow road, few there be that find it, but I don't think that's all that are going to be in heaven. Few there be that find the narrow road, but many are in Christ. How can you have few finding the narrow road and many in Christ? Because the many have come through salvation, which God provides for the little ones.

Revelation chapter 5 says (verses 9 and 10) that in heaven, there were people praising Christ from every tongue and tribe and people and nation. Do you know that passage? Revelation 5:9 and 10? Do you know there are tribes and nations that have never heard the gospel? But there will still be representatives from those tribes and nations in heaven, praising Christ, because they died in their infancy or childhood or without the ability to understand.

Two other passages, Matthew 18 and then Matthew 19. Matthew 18, a wonderful passage that I don't often see even used in this discussion. In fact, in everything I read, I never found this passage referred to and I read a lot of books. Matthew 18:14, "Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones" - what? - "perish." That's a pretty strong statement, isn't it? You say, "Yeah, but He's talking about believers, He's not talking about - this isn't a discussion of children." He says in verse 3 - He's got a child in His arms in verse 2, and He's using a child as an illustration.

He picks up this little baby, Jesus does. Some say it was probably a child in Peter's family, it could

have been at Peter's house. He's got a little baby in His arms and He wants to give an illustration. So He says, "You're not even going to come into the kingdom unless you become like a child." And so the child is an illustration, the child is for the purpose of analogy. And if you're going to come into my kingdom, you need to humble yourself like this little child. And you need to receive each other like little children.

And you don't want to cause each other to stumble. You'd be better off dead than to cause one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble. So He's simply using a child as an illustration. You have to come like a child and you have to be loved like a child. And once you come into the kingdom, you need to treat each other like children. You need to care for each other and not do harmful things to each other. And when - verse 10 - when somebody looks down on one of these little ones, the very angels of heaven are concerned because the Father is concerned.

The picture here is of the believer like a child. You come in like a child, dependent, without any merit, without any accomplishment, without any achievement. That's how you come into the kingdom. You come in naked, as it were, and crying for help like a child. Once you're in the kingdom, you're still a child, and you're to be loved like a child and cared for like a child and protected like a child. And in verse 12, He says if one of them wanders away, you go and get them. Pretty obvious.

If you had a whole bunch of kids and one of them didn't show up for dinner at night, you wouldn't say, "Ah, well, we got six more, you know, and Albert was a pain anyway, never did what we told him, so let him go." No, somebody is down the street, trying to find Albert. And that's the point, it's a child, a child will wander.

And the picture here is of a child that is analogous to believers, and so when you get to 14 and it says, "It's not the will of your Father who is heaven that one of these little ones perish," the only thing that makes sense is that He's talking about believers, but the analogy is perfect because He doesn't want a believer to perish any more than He wants the little ones to perish. Otherwise, the analogy doesn't make sense. God no more wants His children to perish, His spiritual children to perish, than He wants a little one to perish.

You come in like a child, you need to be cared for like a child, treated like a child, protected like a child, rescued like a child, and God is not going to let you perish, be devastated and destroyed any more than He would allow one of His little ones to go through that. Like little babies, believers are. Same way that God is concerned about the little ones, He's concerned about His own. So the analogy only makes sense if little ones don't perish. If little children perish, then the analogy doesn't make sense, right?

And then especially Matthew 19 - and this is really - this is found in three places, Matthew 19:13 to 15; Mark 10:13 to 16, which I read earlier, in the service; and Luke 18:15 to 17. It's in all these synoptic gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke - and you know the passage, Matthew 19:13, some children were brought to Him. The parents are bringing their little children, and He can lay His hands on them for the purpose of blessing and praying over them, and the disciples rebuked them. The disciples hadn't had their first lesson in child salvation. They're about to get it. "Get those kids out of here."

Jesus said, "Let the children alone, do not hinder them from coming to me, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." You say, "But He's talking about believers there." But it wouldn't

make any sense if the kingdom of heaven didn't belong to them, then it can't belong to us by analogy. Has to belong to them. So you say, "Well, this is just an analogy, just an analogy." Well, look, it's a great analogy. A child can do nothing for himself to be saved. A child can earn no salvation. A child can offer no accomplishment, no merit, no achievement - totally dependent on sovereign grace. That's the way we come.

The kingdom is full of people just like them, saved purely on the basis of sovereign grace. And I would remind you that according to Mark, as I read earlier, Jesus picked those little children up and blessed them. I can't find anywhere in my Bible where Jesus blesses non-believers, can you? I can't find anywhere where He blesses the cursed. I can't find any place in Scripture where He pronounces a blessing on the damned or indiscriminately pronounces a blessing on a combination of His own and the devil's.

These were real children He had in His arms - real children - and He said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." That's the analogy. Just as much as the kingdom belongs to those little ones should they perish, should they die - not perish in the judgment sense, just as the kingdom belongs to those little ones should they die, so it belongs to us who are spiritual children. So Jesus said, "Don't forbid them from coming to me." And He really rebuked His ignorant disciples who then had their first lesson in the matter of God's attitude toward the little ones.

The disciples were dead wrong. Children do make up the heavenly kingdom. When we get to heaven, it's going to be filled with the little ones who never saw the light of day, who never came alive out of the womb, who came alive out of the womb but never reached understanding, and some who grew up to physical adulthood but whose minds never, ever developed to the point of understanding. And the Lord blesses those and gathers them to Himself.

John Calvin, in his commentary on Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Volume 2, said, "Those children have not yet any understanding to desire His blessing, but when they are presented to Him, He gently and kindly receives them and dedicates them to the Father by a solemn act of blessing." End quote. And thus did Jesus demonstrate that they were under special gracious care. Calvin went on to say, and I quote, "It would be too cruel to exclude that age from the grace of redemption. It is an irreligious audacity to drive from Christ's fold those whom He held in His bosom and to shut the door on them as strangers when He did not wish to forbid them," end quote.

It was the great nineteenth century Presbyterian Charles Hodge who wrote, quote: "He tells us of such is the kingdom of heaven as though heaven was in great measure composed of the souls of redeemed infants." And the great Princeton theologian, B. B. Warfield wrote, "If all that die in infancy are saved, it can only be through the abrupt operation of the Holy Spirit, who rules when and where and how He pleases, through whose ineffable grace the Father gathers these little ones to the home He has prepared for them." End quote.

It would be hard to find a more noble theological triumvirate than Calvin, Hodge, and Warfield, and they affirm the intent of this passage, to teach God's special saving purpose which fills His kingdom with the little ones.

In conclusion, what age will they be in heaven? Some of you already asked me that. I guess another way to phrase the question: Will there be strollers in the new Jerusalem? No. Whatever their

limitations here, whatever their imperfections here, whatever their immaturities here, they aren't there. So how do you know that? Because 1 John 3:2 says that when we get to heaven, we'll all be like Christ, right? We'll all be conformed, Romans 8:29 says, to His image. And one thing we know for absolute sure, all the redeemed of all the ages in heaven are going to be occupied doing one particular glorious thing.

Revelation 7:9, "After these things I looked and, behold, a great multitude which no one could count from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues." They're all going to be there, and perhaps the largest part of that group will be those who were saved in their infancy by sovereign grace. And another way to say that is all infants who die are elect, and heaven will be filled with them from every tongue and nation and tribe and people. They'll all be standing before the throne. They'll all be standing before the Lamb.

"They'll be clothed in white robes, palm branches in their hands, crying out with a loud voice saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.' And all the angels were standing around the throne, around the elders, the four living creatures, they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, all saying, 'Amen, blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, might be to our God forever and ever. Amen.'"

You've got again in Revelation chapter 4 another picture of the redeemed in heaven, in chapter 5 another picture of redeemed in heaven. One thing is very true: When we get to heaven, we're going to be like Christ. The second thing that is very true: When you get to heaven, you're going to spend forever praising Him. Therefore, there must be enough maturity to bear the image of Christ and enough maturity to understand the significance of eternal praise. Perfect maturity, perfect understanding.

You say, "Well, will my little baby that I miscarried, my little baby that died at - perinatal, died at birth," "My little baby that died at the age of one" or two or four or five or six or eight, "will that little child know me? Will it be a reunion?" What did David say? "He cannot come to me but I shall go to" - he didn't say, "I'm going to go to his place," he said, "I'm going to go to him." Heaven is the place of perfect reunions. All your little ones, all those who never developed mentally, they'll be there, they'll be waiting.

First Corinthians 13 says, "You will know as you are known." You'll have perfect knowledge, perfect maturity, and you'll know everything you need to know, and you'll be gathered to those that love you.

Now look, this is wonderful news, great news. This is one of those, I guess you could say, in the category, the best thing I ever heard. Why do I say that? Well, we had a miscarriage, Patricia had a miscarriage, and so we have a little one in heaven. And you know, that child caused us no problems. I'm telling you, none. Is that good? Is that joyous? The real challenge is the ones that are here. Beloved, I know you feel that, don't you? Feel it for your children, feel it for your grandchildren. Because you don't want an Absalom, do you? You don't want the rebellious son. Maybe you've even thought better, like Job, there had been a miscarriage.

So there's that challenge there. What can you do? Well, just everything you can. Pray, set an example, expose them to the truth, surround them with godly influence, bring them up in the nurture

and admonition of the Lord. It's incessant intercession.

Just in the last two days - I don't like to tell stories about my grandkids, but in the last, I guess, four or five days, I asked three of my grandchildren if they knew the Lord, if they had confessed Christ and invited Him into their life, and it's just on my heart. It's something Patricia and I pray about all the time. It's something their parents pray about all the time. And you're the same, aren't you? That's the great challenge.

Now we face the necessity to be the instruments of God's grace to those who survive. But I can promise you that God is gracious and God is faithful, and God will never give you more than you can bear. And I do believe that God will honor your prayers. And when you have that broken heart that comes over a wayward child, you can only commit him to the Lord and look to other points in your life where God's grace is displayed. Don't give up hope and prayer. Be faithful because that is the great challenge ahead of us.

Father, thank you again for your Word, the length and breadth and height and depth of it that touches all the issues of life so greatly. And we desire, Father, that you would give us confidence about the little ones and that you would give us strength and wisdom about the grown ones, those that are growing up to understand the issues of law and grace and sin and salvation, and may we be faithful to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and to raise them in such a way that they will come to embrace the Savior.

Give special grace to those parents whose hearts have been broken like David's was, sometimes in a final way, sometimes it's not final yet, but give grace to those parents to find a place of joy even in the midst of sorrow and disappointment over some children who continue to rebel, continue to pray for their redemption. We thank you for your great grace, sovereign grace. In Christ's name. Amen.

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