

The Salvation of Babies Who Die, Part 2

Selected Scriptures

This is Part Two of a subject I began last Sunday night, "The Salvation of Babies who Die." Very thankful and gratified for the response 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 at Third World countries where they see a lot of death, childhood death, infant death. And I was talking to one neo-natal nurse, a nurse who works in a very difficult situation with premies 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...a very important matter to the parents 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 waves 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 dying 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 a 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. But 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 understanding convincingly sin and salvation, they cannot exercise that faith.

We also ended last time by saying Scripture nowhere teaches infant damnation, nowhere. But Scripture does teach, according to Revelation chapter 20 verse 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 is a record of their...what?...their sins, Revelation 20:11 and 12.

Dominant sin that 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 a 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 damning sin. But their judgment comes about based upon the record of the consequence 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, etc. 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. 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 in 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, and 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 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, 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 into 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's 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 for 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 on 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 have 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 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. It would be outside the will of God. They would be...they would be essentially pagan Jews who were worshipping 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 innocence 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 Ninevah, 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's kind of the way it was. And they didn't really want to include them. Jonah wanted Ninevah, 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 Ninevah, the great city in which there are more than 120 thousand 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 breast of the field shall give Me honor, He said in Isaiah.

But what about the 120 thousand 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 thousand people who really don't know the difference in what they do?

You see here that God has restrained His judgment on Ninevah 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 innocence. 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, until 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'll 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 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, 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 were just thrown in a field.

But I picked you up and washed you. 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 prostitute's clothes and you go out in the middle of the streets and you play the harlot with everybody.

And verse 20, "You took your sons and daughters whom you had born 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 and 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, it 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 it would have been better off if I had been still born. 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 still born, 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 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...2 Samuel chapter 12...2 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 Israel and under the sun.

See, 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 that is also 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 his 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 and 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 mind, he had attached his entire sense of well-being 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 had 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 he 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." He was 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? 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 wake 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 23rd Psalm in which David said, "Surely goodness and loving kindness 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 the 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...swish...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 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 Ittai 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 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.

Well this poor man says...I don't care how much money you give me, I'm not going to kill Absalom...if the king finds out I've killed Absalom, I've 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. They killed him.

Now verse 32, a 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 is 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 is 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 those very important passages that speaks to the very issue, not of innocence or ownership but of actual 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 who belongs 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 heaven will eat." Let the vultures tear their bodies up. Don't bury anybody from the house of Jeroboam. Let it be 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, in 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...it's not righteous merit, but it is this, he was the only one who had not knowingly, willfully rebelled against God. 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 of 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 learn 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 know 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 and 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 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," etc. "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 by that find it, but I don't think that's all that are going to be in heaven. Few there by 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 in nations that have never heard the gospel? But there still will 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 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 about...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 in 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're going to have 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's 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. I mean, that's 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, "Oh well, we've 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. 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 anymore than He wants a little one 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 anymore 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 than 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. It 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 II, 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 to 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 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 have 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.

You say, "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 para-natal, 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 his place, he said, "I'm going to go to him." Heaven is the place of perfect reunions. All the 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? It was a challenge, just 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.

And 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. Incessant intercession.

Just in the last two days, I don't like to tell stories about my grandkids, but 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 them into their life. And it's just on my heart...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 that 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. We continue to pray for their redemption We thank You for Your great grace, sovereign grace in Christ's name. Amen.

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