

**Jesus Loves The Little Children
(Why I Believe Children Who Die Go To Heaven)**

Mark 10:13-16

Introduction: 1) As a little boy I grew up in a Christian home and began attending church 9 months before making my public arrival into this world. I then continued to attend church multiple times every week, and I both learned and fell in love with many Christian children's songs. "Jesus Loves Me This I Know" is still my favorite song of all time. Its basic biblical truth is simple and yet profound.

Jesus loves me this I know,
For the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to Him belong,
They are weak but He is strong.
Yes, Jesus loves me,
The Bible tells me so.

Sounds like the author of this song was reflecting on Mark 9:36-37, 42 and Mark 10:13-16.

2) A second song I quickly grew fond of was "Jesus Loves The Little Children."

-Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the world;
Red and yellow, black and white,
They are precious in His sight,
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

3) Jesus does indeed love the little children of the world. Sadly, and most unfortunately for so many little ones, many do not. In Jesus' day as well as our own, children are viewed as a liability and not an asset until they reach an age where they can be productive and contribute something to society. Some treat them as little more than a commodity to be used and discarded if they seem to be of little or no value.

- The value of children historically:

Biblical examples of dishonoring children as image bearers include Herod's killing of babies during Jesus' day (following the similar evil practice of Pharaoh's killing of little babies in Exodus). Children were not held in high esteem by Romans. By Jesus' time, it's reported that the Romans had a trash heap beside many homes, where they often left unwanted children. Children were left in the dung pile or in the trash; and if people wanted them, they would pick them up. Sometimes these kids were raised to be prostitutes, gladiators or slaves.

- The value of children in our day:
 - Over 140 million orphans (these are orphans by death of parents only-doesn't take abandoned or trafficked children into account).
 - Sub-Sahara Africa: 24-25 countries with highest level of HIV. 14 million children orphaned because of HIV/ AIDS.
 - Half a million children are in US Foster Care System. 130,000 are available for adoption.
 - 2.2 billion children in the world; 1 billion in poverty.
 - 2 million in a brothel being used.
 - 40% of kids go to bed without a father in America.
 - 1.7 million children will have a parent in prison this Christmas (*World*, 10-22-11).

4) On February 23, 1992 John Piper preached a sermon entitled, "Receiving Children in Jesus Name." In that message he noted, "If you leave out the heartache of miscarriages and the genocide of abortion, the statistics are painful. Fourteen million children who reach the age of birth die each year before the age of five. If we could all put a face on each of those children and hear the wheezing and the cries and feel the final limp silence, what an ocean of grief would fill

the world. I always marvel at the awesome emotional depth and complexity of God that enables him to empathize with the grief of millions and millions of parents all the time, and yet rejoice with those who rejoice with him. Of these fourteen million, about ten million die from five conditions: about five million from diarrhea; about three million from measles, tetanus, and whooping cough; and about two million from respiratory infections, mainly pneumonia. Most of these could be saved by simple Oral Rehydration Therapies for the diarrhea; a five dollar injection for the measles, tetanus, and whooping cough; and a \$.50 antibiotic for the respiratory problems. But of course the vast majority of these children are among the desperately poor, far from the medical blessings we take for granted. About 800,000,000 people live in absolute poverty. Of these, 70,000,000 are on the threshold of starvation. Another 400,000,000 consume less than the “minimum critical diet.” Half of the children of the absolute poor do not live to be five. Over 100 million children are always hungry. Keep in mind that about 195,000,000 of these poor are professing Christians. America is one of the most violent countries in the world against its children. Not only do we kill a million and a half pre-born children a year, but 22% of the children in America live in poverty; one out of every four girls under eighteen has probably been sexually abused by someone close to her; possibly as high as 30% of all mental retardation may be owing to fetal alcohol syndrome; one study of 36 hospitals showed that in 10% of the pregnancies mothers used illegal drugs during pregnancy; and 89% of school teachers surveyed report that abuse and neglect of children are a problem in their education. The American home is increasingly an unsafe place for children to be. And there is no better place. The family is God’s will.”

5) On the other hand, especially in American culture, and sometimes in Christian homes, children can be turned into idols to be pampered and cuddled, placed at the center of a universe

they will gladly occupy. The only way to have a balanced view of children is to have a biblical view, to see them as God sees them. God affirms they are His gift to parents (Psalm 127:128). God also says they provide an exquisite illustration as to how we enter the kingdom of God (v. 14-15).

6) As he continues teaching on discipleship, chapter 10 easily divides into 5 major sections: 1) Marriage (10:1-12); 2) Children (10:13-16); 3) Possessions (10:17-31); 4) Service (10:32-45); 5) Faith (10:46-52). Children are the 2nd subject addressed and the concern and love our Savior has for them is crystal clear. Jesus teaches 2 basic truths about the little ones He loves.

I. We should bring children to Jesus.

10:13-14

- Mark has just concluded Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce. It would be natural for him to now include a section on children. It is no surprise that Jesus had a special affection for them. What is surprising is that the disciples didn't!
- Jesus, I am certain, loved them for who they are, a work of His sovereign Father. He also loved them for what they illustrate and teach; how anyone enters the kingdom of God.
- One would have a very difficult time finding in ancient literature concern for children comparable to that shown by Jesus (*Edwards*, 306).

1) Love them to Jesus.

10:13

- The text says "they were bringing children to Jesus." They mean both dad and mom. It could imply extended family and friends as well. They wanted these little ones who could not get to Jesus on their own to meet Him and to be "touched by Him."
- In contrast, the disciples thought, "what a waste of time" and in very strong words "rebuked" them. As Jesus' "political handlers" and elite entourage they sought to

restrict access to those who would love children to Jesus. Their attitude and actions are a replay of their exclusivism and elitism toward the exorcist in 9:38.

- Question: are you like those who want to love children to Jesus or are you like the disciples who have no time for babysitting?!

1) Will you work in the nursery?

2) Will you work with pre-schoolers?

3) Will you work with school-age children?

4) Will you work at VBS? AWANAS?

5) Will you work with children in sports, etc.?

6) Will you stand up and be heard on the evils of abortion, sex-trafficking, poverty?

2) Lead them to Jesus.

10:14

- When Jesus saw the disciples fussing at the folks bringing children to Him, He wiggled out! He went nuclear! The text says, “When Jesus saw, it, he was indignant.” This is the only time in the gospel Jesus is said to be indignant. His anger, righteous anger, was aroused and He publicly rebuked them in the strongest terms. James Edwards says, “The object of a person’s indignation reveals a great deal about the person. Jesus’ displeasure here reveals his compassion and defense of the helpless, vulnerable, and powerless.” (*Mark*. 306).
- He then provides a 3-fold response: 1) “let the children come to me,” 2) “do not hinder them;” 3) “for to such belongs the kingdom of God.”
- Jesus is affirming that children are worth His time and they should be worth our time! Now, how do we “lead them to Jesus?”
 - 1) Evangelize them with a gospel saturated home.

- 2) Disciple them with a Bible saturated home.
- 3) Pray with them in a prayer saturated home.
- 4) Encourage them to live always for God's glory and pleasure.
- 5) Bless them with your words as you project a future where they do something great for God.
- 6) Model for them a "Christ-intoxicated life." Let them see that living for Jesus is the natural and normal ebb and flow of life.
- 7) Challenge them to attempt great things for God and believe great things from God.
- 8) Make a conscious decision to give them totally and completely to God for His will and way in their life, no matter what!
- 9) Realize all of this involves a significant time commitment.
- 10) Remember that loving and leading a child to Jesus is as much caught as it is taught.

II. We should learn from children about the Kingdom of God. 10:14-16

- It is teaching time once again for the 12 apostles. There is something about a child that is essential for entrance into the kingdom of God.
- It is not their innocence for they are not innocent! They are little sinners just like we are big sinners.
- It is not their purity for they are not pure.
- It is not that they are sweet. Again, they are sinners with Adam and Eve's and your and my DNA running throughout their being.

- Still, children are a better example of how to enter the kingdom than are adults. I love what Warren Wiersbe says, “We tell children to behave like adults, but Jesus tells the adults to model themselves after the children!” (*Be Diligent*, 99).
- Jesus says to enter my Father’s world be childlike, but not childish.
- And, as a point of theological importance: there is not the slightest hint of infant baptism in this text. There is not a single drop of water. Not one.

1) We come helpless and hopeful. 10:14

- Jesus says children are the kind of people who enter, “belong” to “the kingdom of God.” We see them 1) coming to Jesus with the help of others, 2) no doubt with some degree of hope and expectation, small though it may be.
- The phrase “to such belongs” is instructive. Children teach us something about entering the kingdom of God.
- Children are helpless. They can do next to nothing for themselves. Their very life is in the hands of another.
- And yet, even at a very tender age, they seem to be filled with hope and expectation. Oh, they don’t know all that they need, but they know they need the help of another and they are hopeful they will receive it.
- They come small, helpless, powerless. They have no clout, no standing, they bring nothing but empty hands! And, only empty hands can be filled!

2) We come trusting and dependent. 10:15

- Jesus says the kingdom of God is received not earned. Jesus says the kingdom of God is received like a little child or it is not received at all.

- By their display of trust and absolute dependence on another, children point the way to entrance into God's kingdom.
- A child has a capacity to enjoy a lot but they can explain very little. They live by faith. Trust. Dependence.
 - They must trust another to live.
 - They must trust another to survive.

3) We come for affection and blessing.

10:16

- Jesus picked up the children. What a picture of massive grace. What a picture of the gospel! He is tender and affectionate to those who bring nothing to Him but their need.
- “He blessed them, laying his hands on them.” In their wonderful book *The Blessing*, John Trent and Gary Smalley note there were several components of the Hebrew blessing. Five are noted:
 - 1- Meaningful touch
 - 2- A spoken word
 - 3- Attaching high value
 - 4- Picturing a special future
 - 5- An active commitment
- 1) Our Lord touched, picked up and held these children
- 2) He spoke a word of blessing over them.
- 3) He attached very high value as to their worth intrinsically and for instruction purpose.
- 4) Might he have spoken prophetic words for future service in God's kingdom?

5) He made an active commitment to see the blessing fulfilled. Calvary and the cross say it all.

Conclusion: So, Jesus loves the little children. That truth begs a very important question: what happens to those who died in infancy, who die young, who never reach an age of moral discernment or what is often called “the age of accountability?” And, as the subtitle of the message states, “Why Do I Believe Children Who Die Go To Heaven?”

Few things in life are more tragic and heartbreaking than the death of a baby or small child. For parents, the grief can be overwhelming.

Many console themselves with the thought that at least the child is now in a better place. Some believe small children who die become angels. This is a rather popular myth.

However, do we really know those who die in infancy go to heaven? How do we know? What evidence is there to support such a conclusion? Sentimentalism and emotional hopes and wants are not sufficient for those who live under the authority of the Word of God.

It is interesting to discover that the Church has not been of one mind on this issue. Some Church Fathers remained silent on the issue. Ambrose said unbaptized infants were not admitted to heaven, but have immunity from the pains of hell. Augustine basically affirmed the damnation of all unbaptized infants, but taught they would receive the mildest punishment of all. Gregory of Nyssa believed that infants who die immediately mature and are given the opportunity to trust Christ. Calvin affirmed the certain election of some infants to salvation and was open to the possibility that all infants who die are saved. He said, “Christ receives not only those who, moved by holy desire and faith, freely approach unto Him, but those who are not yet of age to know how much they need His grace.” Zwingli, B.B. Warfield and Charles Hodge all

taught that God saves all who die in infancy. This perspective has basically become the dominant view of the Church in the 20th and 21st century.

Yet, a popular evangelical theologian chided Billy Graham when at the Oklahoma City bombing memorial service he said, “Someday there will be a glorious reunion with those who have died and gone to heaven before us, and that includes all those innocent children that are lost. They’re not lost from God because any child that young is automatically in heaven and in God’s arms.” The theologian scolded Dr. Graham for offering what he called “. . . a new gospel: justification by youth alone.”

Now, it is my conviction that there are good reasons biblically and theologically for believing that God saves all who die who do not reach a stage of moral understanding and accountability. It is readily admitted that Scripture does not speak to this issue directly, yet there is evidence that can be gleaned that would lead us to affirm on biblical grounds that God receives into heaven all who have died in infancy. I will note seven of them.

First, the grace, goodness and mercy of God would support the position that God saves all infants who die. This is the strongest argument and perhaps the decisive one. God is love (1 John 4:8) and desires that all be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). God is love and His concern for children is evident in Matthew 18:14 where Jesus says, “Your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.” People go to hell because they choose in willful rebellion and unbelief to reject God and His grace. Children are incapable of this kind of conscious rejection of God. Where such rebellion and willful disobedience is absent, God is gracious to receive.

Second, when the baby boy who was born to David and Bathsheba died (2 Samuel 12:15-18), David did two significant things: 1) He confessed his confidence that he would see the child

again and, 2) he comforted his wife Bathsheba (vs. 23-24). David could have done those two things only if he was confident that his little son was with God.

Third, in James 4:17, the Bible says, “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.” The Bible is clear that we are all born with a sin nature as a result of being in Adam (Roman 5:12). This is what is called the doctrine of original sin. However, the Scriptures make a distinction between original sin and actual sins. Infants are incapable of actual sins because they are incapable of moral discernment. Original sin is why infants die physically. Actual sins committed in the body with knowledge and understanding is why people die spiritually and eternally if they die without Christ (2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12-13).

Fourth, Jesus affirmed that the kingdom of God belonged to little children, (Mark 10:13-16, Luke 18:15-17). In these passages he is stating that saving faith is a childlike faith, but He also seems to be affirming the reality of children populating heaven.

Fifth, Scripture affirms that the number of saved souls is very great (Revelation 7:9). Since most of the world has been and is still non-Christian, might it be the untold multitude who have died prematurely or in infancy comprise a majority of those in heaven? Such a possibility ought not to be dismissed too quickly. In this context Charles Spurgeon said, “I rejoice to know that the souls of all infants, as soon as they die, speed their way to paradise. Think what a multitude there is of them.”

Sixth, some in Scripture are said to be chosen or sanctified from the womb (1 Samuel 1:8-2:21; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:15). This certainly affirms the salvation of some infants and repudiates the view that only baptized babies are assured of heaven. Neither Samuel, Jeremiah or John the Baptist was baptized.

Seventh, Deuteronomy 1:35-39 is particularly helpful at this point. After the children of Israel rebelled against God in the wilderness, God sentenced that generation to die in the wilderness after forty years of wandering. “Not one of these men, this evil generation, shall see the good land which I swore to give your fathers.” (1:35). But this was not all. God specifically exempted young children and infants from this sentence, and even explained why He did so: “Moreover, your little ones who you said would become 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.” (1:39). The key issue here is that God specifically exempted from the judgment those who “have no knowledge of good or evil” because of their age. These “little ones” would inherit the Promised Land, and would not be judged on the basis of their fathers’ sins. We believe that this passage bears directly on the issue of infant salvation, and that the accomplished work of Christ has removed the stain of original sin from those who die in infancy. Knowing neither good nor evil, these young children are incapable of committing sins in the body – are not yet moral agents – and die secure in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. John Newton, the great minister who wrote the hymn Amazing Grace was certain of this. He wrote to close friends who had lost a young child: “I hope you are both well reconciled to the death of your child. I cannot be sorry for the death of infants. How many storms do they escape! Nor can I doubt, in my private judgment, that they are included in the election of grace.” (Letter IX).

Now, it is important for us to remember that anyone who is saved is saved because of the grace of God, the saving work of Jesus Christ and the undeserved and unmerited regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Like all who have ever lived, except for Jesus, infants need to be saved. Only Jesus can take away their sin, and if they are saved it is because of His sovereign grace and abounding mercy. Abraham said, “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25).

We can confidently say, “Yes, He will.” When it comes to those incapable of volitional, willful acts of sin, we can rest assured God will, indeed, do right. Precious little ones are the objects of His saving mercy and grace.

On September 29, 1861, the great Baptist pastor, Charles Spurgeon, preached a message entitled “Infant Salvation.” In that message he chastened some critics who had “. . . wickedly, lyingly, and slanderously said of Calvinists that we believe that some little children perish.” Similar rumblings have been heard in some evangelical circles in our day. Spurgeon affirmed that God saved little ones without limitation and without exception. He, then, as was his manner, turned to conclude the message with an evangelistic appeal to parents who might be lost. Listen to his plea:

“Many of you are parents who have children in heaven. Is it not a desirable thing that you should go there too? And yet, have I not in these galleries and in this area some, perhaps many, who have no hope hereafter? . . . Mother, unconverted mother, from the battlements of heaven your child beckons you to Paradise. Father, ungodly, impenitent father, the little eyes that once looked joyously on you, look down upon you now and the lips which had scarcely learned to call you “Father” ere they were sealed by the silence of death, may be heard as with a still, small voice, saying to you this morning, “Father, must we be forever divided by the great gulf which no man can pass?” If you wilt, think of these matters, perhaps the heart will begin to move, and the eyes may begin to flow and then may the Holy Spirit put before thine eyes the cross of the Savior. . . if thou wilt turn thine eye to Him, thou shalt live . . .”

Little ones are precious in God’s sight. If they die, they go to heaven. Parents, who have trusted Jesus, who have lost a little one, if they have trusted Jesus, can be confident of a wonderful reunion someday. Are you hopeful of seeing again that little treasure God entrusted to you for such a short time? Jesus has made a way.