

Mark 10 (13-16) – Yes, Your Baby is in Heaven

There aren't many things in life that are more tragic than the death of a baby. The grief can be overwhelming. Even strong Christians are left wondering why God would allow something as heartbreaking as this to happen. How does this fit into our understanding of God?

Well, my strong and settled belief is that believing in the sovereignty of God is crucial. It centers your life on someone beyond you and greater than you. But you can't focus exclusively on His sovereignty alone. In your distress, you might find that your theological formula is inadequate. Something important is missing. The issue is that in times like this, you might not doubt God's sovereignty. What you're struggling with is His goodness. So that's what people need to come to grips with. How is God showing His goodness in this?

First of all, you must understand that our circumstances do not determine the extent of God's goodness since goodness is part of the very nature of who God is. If God is good, then He is good even when the good of the moment isn't visible with our limited sight, and even though He allowed this child to die. When such tragedies occur, as we weep, and pray, we need to surrender to the truth that God is not only sovereign, He is also good.

And to demonstrate that I want to tell you of God's good plan for the salvation of infants. If you can see that God can take the most tragic of situations and still show His goodness, then you can know that He is good no matter what you have to go through, and you can trust Him.

I believe that God saves all the little ones who die, without exception. John Newton, the man who wrote *Amazing Grace* was certain of this truth. Great theologians of the past such as Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield held the same position, as did the prince of preachers, Charles Spurgeon. And so do great modern day men like Albert Mohler, John MacArthur and John Piper.

Still, for those who live under the authority of the Word of God, it isn't enough to believe that God saves the dying infants just because others whom we admire think so. And it isn't enough to just chalk it up to some emotional reason, because if God says no, it means no, whether I feel like that is right or not. For the biblical Christian, it comes down to what the Bible teaches.

That's why I want to tell you that the Bible is clear about the fate of infants who die. By "clear" I don't mean that there is a single verse that exactly says "all dying infants go to heaven". By "clear" I mean that the sweep of Scripture provides a compelling and cumulative case about this issue. I want to give you confidence in God's goodness, and assure you that your confidence is not a simple sentimentality, or that it is just a wishful hope derived from theological ambiguities. Rather, our confidence has its foundation in the biblical testimony of the saving nature of God.

No death occurs apart from the purposes of God, just as no life occurs apart from the purposes of God. And God has a good purpose in the death of infants. It causes us to cry out to God, it humbles us to realize that our only hope is their only hope, and that is God's saving grace. And in this message, when I mention babies, or infants, this would include miscarriages, other unborn children, including those of unbelievers, and severely mentally disabled adults. So now let's take a look at what the Scriptures teach, and understand God's goodness, even in tragedy.

In Deuteronomy 1:39, God describes children as “having no knowledge of good and evil”. They have a sin nature, but they have not as yet sinned in the way that adults do. There is a difference between the sinful nature that we are all born with, and the sin we actually commit, by acting out of that sinful nature. But while all are guilty of original sin, moral responsibility and understanding is necessary for our being accountable for actual sins.

This leads us to Deuteronomy 24:16, which explains that God will not hold children accountable for what their parents did, and God won’t punish parents for what their children did, either. People are responsible for their own sin. The consequence of Adam’s sin is that we all are born with a sin nature, but not that God will send us all to hell irrespective of our own actions.

This same truth is repeated in Ezekiel 18:20. Death is the consequence of a sin nature, and everyone one dies eventually. But God does not send a person to hell because of their parent’s sin, including our first parent, Adam.

In Jeremiah 19:4, God refers to children who are murdered as “innocents”. In Ezekiel 16:21, God describes the slaughter of children born into idol worshiping families as a slaughter of “my children”. This does not mean that they were born without a sin nature, they weren’t innocent of all sin, but they were not held morally accountable because they lacked moral awareness.

Think about all the suffering that Job went through, as he lost all ten of his children, all of his servants, and all of his animals, all of his wealth, and then all of his health. In Job 3:11-19 we see Job wishing that he would have died at birth or have been still-born. He wasn’t simply being dramatic. He was a godly man, who understood the afterlife, the reality of hell, and the need for a redeemer. Job declares that dead infants go to a place where the wicked can’t bother them, and where the weary find rest. By using the terms “infants” and “stillborn child” we know that this is a statement with universal application. All infants who die or who are stillborn are free from torment. This is obviously not a description of hell. And we know it doesn’t just mean the quiet of the grave because we know that Job believed in the afterlife (Job 19:25-27).

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon talks about a man who has everything but it still doesn’t satisfy him, and he says a miscarried or stillborn child is better off than him (Ecclesiastes 6:3-6).

In 2 Samuel 12:23, we see David mourning over his sick baby son. When the child dies, people wonder why David started worshipping. It’s because he knew that his son was safe in the arms of God. He said I can go to him, even though he won’t come back to me. That is the response of a man who knew God, who knew where his son was, and where he would be one day, in heaven.

Isaiah 7:16 refers to children learning “the difference between good and evil”. There is an age where children sin, but not because they know it and want to sin. They rebel out of their sinful nature, not out of their knowledge of sin. The Bible obviously doesn’t give an age of accountability, but it describes a condition of accountability, which infants don’t meet.

We all die because we are all part of a fallen world. Romans 5:12-14 teaches us that all humanity participated in Adam’s fall (cf. Psalm 51:5). But Romans 5:12-14 also teaches us the difference between the sin of condition and the sin of volition. In other words there is a difference between

the sinful nature we are all born with, which is the reason we all die, and the sins that we actually commit, which are what send us to hell, if we don't trust in Jesus. There is a difference between sinning willfully, like Adam, and being born with a sinful nature, because of Adam. The rest of the New Testament reinforces this distinction.

In Matthew 15:19-20, when Jesus mentions sins that will be judged, He mentions things that infants lack the ability to commit. In Mark 10:13-16, Jesus talks about how heaven belongs to children. Now there is a lot more going on in that passage, of course. But at the very least, Jesus is implying that children would go to heaven if they died.

Romans 1:19-21 tells us that people who are judged are "without excuse" because the things of God are clearly evident in His creation, and yet they reject Him. God judges those who have rejected the knowledge of Him which is evident in the world. This obviously doesn't include infants, because they haven't been able to perceive the truth of God through the created world. The Bible makes a crystal clear category distinction between those who sin willingly (adults) and those who sin by their nature (infants). Adults can discern between right and wrong, and they love the wrong. They rebel against God despite what they know, and they will be judged for their works. Infants have a sin nature, but they do not sin in the same way as adults.

Revelation 21:8 makes it clear that people go to hell for what they have done, and this truth makes no sense if infants are sent there. Every single time the Bible mentions infants who die there is some indication that they receive mercy. And there are no verses that teach the contrary. As hard as it is to deal with the death of an infant, we can still praise God for His wonderful work of salvation, the most important comfort we have during such a difficult situation.

I want to say something about abortion in the light of this truth. Some would say that since we believe that all infants who die are saved, and since we believe that there comes a time when we become accountable and that those who don't know the Lord are condemned, the most loving thing we could do is to abort even more babies. Well this sort of thinking is perverse. Abortion is murder, and the Bible is absolutely clear that murder is sin (Genesis 9:6 / Exodus 20:13 / John 8:44 / Romans 13:9 / Revelation 21:8). You can't justify murder in the name of evangelism. But you can be forgiven if you've aborted a baby. You can see them in heaven.

The merits of Christ's sinless life and atoning death are applied to dying babies and infants, miscarriages, other unborn children, including those of unbelievers, and severely mentally disabled adults. And they are saved simply and only because God is gracious. It is not because they themselves are deserving or sinless. It's not because they died before they could get into too much trouble. They are not "exceptions" to our need for salvation through Christ. They are reminders that the only hope of salvation for anyone is divine grace, not human ability.

God doesn't owe salvation to anyone and He is right to do as He pleases. But He has pleased to show us His goodness in the most tragic of circumstances, so that we know He can be trusted in this otherwise lost and dying world. It should humble you to know we are all in desperate need of His grace. If we will look with the eyes of faith, we can see the light of salvation even through the darkness of death. And I praise the Lord for His saving grace displayed in this way, as hard as it is to deal with when it happens, because yes, your baby is in Heaven.