Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Why Jesus Blessed the Little Children
Scripture: Mark 10:13-16
Code: 41-50

It was a few years ago now that I wrote a little book called *Safe In The Arms Of God*. This was a little book that explains what happens to babies that die. Again I felt it was very important because there was no such book in existence at the time, as there is no such book in existence as the slave book. Once in a while you come across something that needs to be addressed. But the little book, *Safe in the Arms of God*, really came out of a panel discussion that I had national conference where there were five or six pastors seated on the platform and there were several thousand people in the audience and they were asked to convey questions and we were supposed to answer the questions.

The question that came from one of the participants was, “What happens to babies that die?” This was a couple who lost a baby in death and they wanted to know where the baby was. And I was the guy at the end of the line. So they started at the other end, asking each man what he thought, and there was a constant repetition, “We’re not sure...we’re not sure...I can’t really say...I don’t know.” And by the time it got to me, I was really ready to say something other than that.

So, I said, “With all due respect, I think the Bible does tell us what happens to babies that die.” And I gave the answer, which, of course, turned out to be a tremendous encouragement to the people who had lost a baby and many others who had lost them, sometimes even in miscarriage or perhaps had a severely retarded child that never really got intellectually beyond infancy or early childhood. It turned out to be such an encouragement, that I decided to put it in a book, *Safe in the Arms of God*, and I’m glad for that.

Here we are again at this same subject in Mark. We looked at it in Matthew 19 when we went through Matthew some time in another life time long ago. This same passage, this same incident recorded in Matthew 19:13 to 15, we looked at this same incident again in Luke a number of years ago because it’s recorded in Luke 18:15 to 17. So Matthew 19, Luke 18 record this as does Mark chapter 10 verses 13 to 16. We’re in Mark 10:13 to 16.

All three of what we know as the synoptic writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke, because they give us a synopsis of the life of Christ, where as John doesn’t give us a synopsis of the life of Christ. His gospel focuses more on select miracles and select statements made by Jesus. But the three synoptics give us this same incident. And we’re going to be looking at Mark’s record of it. Verse 13, “They were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them but the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, ‘Permit the children to come to Me, do not hinder for the

Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.' And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them."

You know, for many people, and even for many commentators, this is a passage to be overlooked. This is something to kind of skip through because it doesn't seem to carry much import. But quite the contrary. It's one of the really most important passages in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, because it answers this very vast far-reaching question of what happens to babies that die. And since through the history of the world and counted millions of children have died in infancy or early childhood and they continue to do so even in the world today. It is a huge question to answer...where are all the souls of all those children that have died? This is the passage that more than any answers that question. I think it answers it very, very clearly.

What we see here is the Lord blessing these little children and God doesn't bless those who are cursed and Jesus never pronounced a blessing on any other than a person who belonged in His Kingdom. So this is a very unique situation where our Lord blesses little children.

Now this runs in the face of the apostate Judaism that dominated the land of Israel at the time because the Jews were convinced that you earned your way to heaven. You earned your way to heaven by good works. Children couldn't do that. They couldn't accomplish good works. They couldn't do good works. They didn't know the difference between good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness. They were therefore not even to be considered as viable in discussions of the Kingdom of God. And I think it is against that background that our Lord does something here that is absolutely shocking. And it is shocking not only to the crowd that is watching and the Pharisees who were in the crowd, but it is even shocking to the disciples who have imbibed that Pharisaic legalistic system to the degree that they see children as irrelevant to spiritual life, eternal life and the Kingdom. And so this violates the conventional wisdom, Jesus identifying people as a part of His Kingdom who couldn't do anything to earn it, to gain it. It then becomes for us a powerful illustration that salvation is by grace.

There may not be a more powerful illustration of salvation by grace than this. At the same time, it is conversely a rebuke of self-righteous legalism. In fact, I'm prone to think that the best illustration in the gospels of salvation grace is this one because babies are enfolded in the Kingdom who have done absolutely nothing to earn it. They are part of the Kingdom. Secondarily, they are an illustration of all those who are also part of the Kingdom because unless you come like a child, our Lord says in verse 15, self-confessedly weak, helpless, unworthy, dependent, humble with nothing to commend yourself, you can't enter the Kingdom.

So two things go on in this passage. One, the Lord reminds us of a principle that's repeated several times in the New Testament, that the way you enter the Kingdom is in childlike faith. But beyond that,

not only do believers come as children, but children themselves have a special place in the Kingdom. Babies, in fact, serve as an apt illustration of those who enter the Kingdom and receive its blessing because they can do nothing to earn it. And again I say, this is a shocking moment in the ministry of Jesus for the Jews and the disciples who had bought into it.

And by the way, Matthew, Mark and Luke all follow up this incident with the story of the rich, young ruler. You remember that story is the classic example of a self-righteous religious Jew who, though self-righteous and religious, had no place in the Kingdom. This is a man who said, “I have kept all the Law since my youth.” And this man had no place in the Kingdom and here are babies who couldn’t keep the Law at all and they have a place in the Kingdom. This is a dramatic contrast.

Let’s get in to the story. They were bringing children to Him. And I think...stop right there for a minute...to say that this is a very common thing to happen to our Lord, that they brought children to Him because of His great affection. Back in chapter 9 verse 36 it pictures Him picking up a little child, folding that little child into His arms in a very tender and loving fashion. Jesus did show great affection on a number of occasions for children. He also received praise from children. Matthew 21:15 and 16, when He entered into Jerusalem, the children were saying, “Hosanna to Him.” But He wasn’t sentimental about children because in Matthew 11:16 to 18, He told a story about how peevish children could be and how recalcitrant they could be and how obstinate they could be with they played their games in the marketplace. So Jesus had a great affection for children. Jesus received praise from children, “Out of the mouth of babes, God brings forth praise.” But He wasn’t sentimentalized about them, He understood them to be sinful and He knew that that sin manifested itself even in their early activities as children together. But He would have welcomed them on any occasion and so they were bringing children to Him...they, meaning parents. Children here is *paideia,* just a general word, but Luke uses the word *brephos*, that’s babies, that’s infants, sucklings, little children...we’re talking perhaps up to three or four. That’s who we have here in view. They’re bringing their babies. We know they’re babies because verse 16 says He enfolded them in His arms. People are bringing their babies to Jesus, parents who saw His love and saw His power and saw His majesty and heard His preaching about the Kingdom and His teaching about salvation and about eternal life. And these are parents who care about the future of their children. These are parents who want their children to know God, they want their children to be a part of the Kingdom of God, they want their children to have eternal life as any sensible parents would.

There’s some history for this. There are Old Testament illustrations of how fathers blessed their children. There are a number of them all through the patriarchal period, fathers blessed their children, Noah blessed Shem and Japheth. And we see that through the patriarchs, through Jacob and passed down to the next generation and the next, Isaac blessing his sons and Jacob blessing his sons, and this was a typical fatherly benediction pronounced on the heads of children.

What was it about? It was a desire, including a prayer, for their spiritual blessing. It was that God would show favor to them. In fact, it was even more specific. The elders used to say that when you pray for your child and you pray blessing on your child, you pray this, that the child would be famous in the Law, faithful in marriage and abundant in good works, famous in the Law, faithful in marriage and abundant in good works. The father would lay his hands on the child's head. The elders of the synagogue would come together and they would do the same and bless the child, and they would pray for the child.

The Talmud tells us that it was a very customary thing for parents to bring their children, their little children, to be blessed by the elders of the synagogue. And in Judaism there was a special day set aside for this, the day before the Day of Atonement, the day before Yom Kippur. In fact, they would bring their children that day before praying that, of course, the atonement the next day would be applied to those children.

Now in Matthew's version of this, Matthew 19:13, he says, just to give you the full picture, they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them and pray for them...and pray for them. And that's consistent with this kind of blessing. This kind of blessing was in a note form of a prayer, that prayer that God would pour out on this life all the goodness that would lead that child to become famous in the Law, faithful in marriage and do good works. That's exactly what was going on here.

They also wanted Jesus to touch the child. Jesus did everything by touching. He healed with a touch. He touched people all the time, which is exactly what the Pharisees and the scribes never did. They wouldn't touch people because they would be defiled. There was Jesus compassionate, tender to the touch.

So the purpose in bringing them was that He might touch them because that's what fathers did. They laid their hands on the child and the elders laid their hands on the child as the patriarchs had done. And then they prayed blessing.

I believe this is prayer for salvation. The Jews understood salvation, deliverance from judgment, deliverance from sin and deliverance from punishment. I can't help but think that parents wanted their children saved, they wanted their children blessed by God with eternal life. From the Jewish perspective, they wanted God to do whatever He needed to do in their lives, to chase them down the right path of works so that they can gain their salvation.

But this was so contrary to the conventional wisdom of Judaism that immediately the disciples rebuked these parents. The disciples...these were the ones who believe in Jesus, these are the ones who have left legalism and Judaism behind and they rebuke them. And that is a very strong word, *epitimao*, a compound word intensified again by a preposition as verbs tend to be in the Greek language. Literally it means they censured them, or they reprimanded them. In a noun form it means

punishment. They turned on these parents. Their world view, their religious world view was such that children had no place in the system of religion, no place before God. Not until they arrived at the point where they could do the things they needed to do to gain God's favor. So while they had come to salvation by grace, they had imbibed so much of their former system, salvation by works, that they didn't think children fit in anywhere. And, of course, the Lord hadn't apparently said anything to this point about the children, so this is their teaching moment. They strongly protest this group of parents who desired the Lord to bless their babies and pray for their babies, convinced that this would just be an unnecessary trivial interruption. And again, if you just took a Greek New Testament, took the word *epitimao* and started in Mark 3 and traced it through Mark 10, you would see that every time its used, it's a very intense reprimand. So the disciples really let those parents have it.

But they were absolutely wrong. They were absolutely wrong. Jesus responds in verse 14, "When Jesus saw this..." when He saw the attitude of the disciples, and He saw them chasing back these parents, He also responded in a severe way. "He was indignant"...again a very strong verb, to be angry, to be irate. This is not an insignificant issue, not a minor issue. Jesus doesn't pass over this lightly. He is very angry that they would treat children this way.

The parents were not wrong. He did not rebuke the parents. Only the disciples were rebuked for their wrong assumptions and their bad understanding of Scripture. And Luke says, "He then called for the parents who had already probably turned and were moving away, He called for them to come and bring their babies to Him."

He gives no indication of the spiritual condition of the parents. He gives no indication of the possibility of faith in the parents, or unbelief in the parents, or the child's faith, because those are non-issues. A baby can have no faith. A baby is neither a conscious non-believer, or a conscious believer. A baby is neither a compliant child or a rebellious child by choice.

So here our Lord blesses little babies who were neither believers or non-believers, neither receivers or rejecters of divine salvation truth. And again I say, this is very significant because Jesus doesn't pronounce blessing on people outside His Kingdom all of whom are cursed. His response is anger over this because this is a very important truth to understand. And maybe that's why I felt my own indignation rising as I listened to these guys not giving the right answer.

Verse 14, "But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, to the disciples, 'Permit the children to come to Me. Do not hinder them. Let them come. Let them come.'" And then in a present, "Don't even forbid them, let them come," and there would be many of them perhaps, "Let them all come as they will."

The coming of these babies then to Jesus then is very important. So important that not to do it made Him angry...very important.

Why? End of verse 14, and here's the key, "For the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these." The Kingdom of God belongs to such as these, there are no qualifiers there. Okay? There are no caveats there. There are no conditions there. This is so very important. He doesn't say the Kingdom of God belongs to these, as if somehow these particular babies were in the Kingdom. He says the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these, meaning the whole category, or the whole class of beings to which these babies belong. Literally, the Kingdom of God belongs to these kind, babies, infants, little children. Matthew calls it the Kingdom of Heaven and says the same thing. It belongs to such as these. Not just to these, but to the whole category to which these belong. The Kingdom of God belongs to babies. They have a place in the Kingdom. They have a part in the Kingdom.

What is He talking about? The Kingdom? He's talking about the sphere of salvation, the sphere of salvation. Same thing He was always talking about. The sphere in which God rules over those who belong to Him, the spiritual domain in which souls exist under His special care.

Now what's important here is He just said that babies as a category have a part in the Kingdom. They belong to it, it belongs to them, same thing. Nothing is said about the parents' faith, nothing is said about a covenant as if there was some family covenant. Nothing is said about baptism. Nothing is said about circumcision. Nothing is said about any rite, any ritual, any parental promise, parental covenant, or any national covenant. His words simply and completely engulf all babies. They belong to the Kingdom, the Kingdom belongs to them. And if our Lord was ever going to teach infant baptism, this would have been the perfect spot. All He would have to have said was, "These children will possess the Kingdom if you baptize them." But He doesn't say that. This was His golden opportunity, but He said nothing and neither does anybody else in the Bible say anything about infant Baptism.

This is not about personal faith either. He doesn't commend the parents' faith. He doesn't commend the babies faith which would be non-existent. He simply says babies belong in the Kingdom and the Kingdom belongs to them, as a category.

What are we talking about here? Well what we're saying here is that babies when they are babies, before they reach a point in time when before God they become accountable for believing or not believing, are under special divine care. They have a place of care in His Kingdom. He doesn't say "elect babies are in the Kingdom," as some would espouse and non-elect babies are not. He doesn't say that. He doesn't say elect babies being in the Kingdom will go to heaven, non-elect babies not being in the Kingdom will go to hell. He doesn't say that. He simply says categorically babies are in the Kingdom, the Kingdom belongs to them.

Now does this mean they're not sinners? No it doesn't, as you well know. It doesn't mean that at all. Psalm 51:5, David says, "In sin did my mother conceive me, I was brought forth in iniquity from the

get-go." Genesis 5:3, "We're all made in Adam's likeness and in Adam we all die, we're all corrupt," John 3:6, whatever is born of the flesh is flesh. There's none righteous, no not one. You know all of that, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked and who can know it?" These are little sinners, balled up in that little precious infant bundle is the full corruption of fallen humanity in its totality. The Bible is absolutely clear that all children are sinners from conception, Psalm 51. The principle of iniquity is imbedded in their persons. Mark 7, "It's not what comes to a person from the outside that defiles him, it's what comes up from the inside that defiles." The defilement is inherent, it's on the inside. It's imbedded. Iniquity is imbedded in the fabric of their lives. The idea that children are sort of born as morally neutral is not true...is not true. They are morally corrupt and irresistibly bent toward sin. They are not neutral. They are corrupt. It just takes a while for them to reach the place where they can make the choices that evidence that corruption.

There has been a view through church history that children are morally innocent and morally pure until they choose to sin. That's Pelagianism, it's still around in the form of semi-Pelagianism, or Arminianism.

And it says we don't have to sin, when we do sin, that's when we fall. By the way, that view was denounced as heresy after the death of Pelagius. Elements of it still float around today. Infants are not morally neutral, they are sinful. And how do we know that? Because the wages of sin is death and babies die. Death is the evidence of corruption. If they were morally neutral, they wouldn't die until they had reached a point where they made conscious choices about sin but some of them die in the womb and some of them die minutes after, days after, months after, as you know.

Children at that point of life have not chosen consciously to sin. They have not chosen to join Adam and Eve's rebellion. But they're corrupt. And that's why they die..that's why they die. And when they reach the age where they can make choices, and they get there pretty quick, they make bad ones and the Bible says, "Get the rod because you're going to have to drive that out of them." Infants who survive all grow up to be corrupt adults. There is no man who does not sin, 1 Kings 8:46. The wicked are estranged from the womb, Psalm 58:3. They go astray from birth. Proverbs 20 verse 9, "Who can say I have cleansed my heart? I am pure from sin? No one." Ecclesiastes 7:20, "Indeed there's not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins." "There's none righteous, no not one," Romans 3.

Sinfulness is not a condition that comes on people once they choose to do evil. Sinfulness is a condition they're born in that leads them to choose evil. The entire human race is in that condition. So what we're not saying is the children belong to the Kingdom because they're morally neutral and uncorrupted. That is not true. They are corrupt. They are not morally neutral, they are morally flawed, profoundly flawed, they are in a fallen sinful state, that's why death can invade their lives at any point, even in the womb and afterwards. We are not born innocent, we are born guilty of Adam's sin and we are born corrupt, having inherited Adam's nature. Proverbs 22:15, "Foolishness is bound in the heart

of a child." Or Genesis 8:21, "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth," and youth in the Hebrew is the word for childhood and encompasses infancy, from the very get-go. Isaiah 48:8, "I know that you would deal very treacherously and were called a transgressor from the womb."

So all are conceived and born infected with sin, corrupt motives, attitudes, desires, ambitions and objectives. Then if they're in the Kingdom, in any sense, it is an act of grace, okay? It's an act of grace cause they didn't earn it. And they're not in there because they're morally neutral. It's an act of grace, it is an act of grace by which the Lord grants to these little ones a place in the Kingdom...a place in the Kingdom. They are sinners. The death principle is already in them and they will all eventually die, some in infancy. But in the early years, they're not responsible for their spiritual lives. They're not responsible for their choices between sin and righteousness and so if they belong to the Kingdom at all, it is because they have come under special grace by which they belong to God until the time when they reach the condition of being personally accountable. And that's a different point in time for every individual. And that's the message of that verse.

You say, "Well now wait a minute. You mean that they are saved? You mean they have received salvation? Then when they reach the age where they're accountable, they lose it? You mean God gives them salvation? Gives them eternal life and then takes it away?"

Well since eternal life can't be taken away, by definition, eternal life is eternal, that's not what I mean. What I mean is what Jesus must have meant. That He holds them in some state of grace, prior to their reaching the age of accountability. That state of grace is conditional.

You say, "Well what's the condition on?" It becomes eternal life..it becomes eternal life if they die...if they die. If an infant dies, that infant, I believe, is gathered safe in the arms of God. This is evident, I think, in many Old Testament passages that I want you to think with me about briefly. And there's more on this in the book. Deuteronomy 1:39, I'll just mention these to you, Deuteronomy 1:39, you can look them up later, refers to little ones who have no knowledge of good or evil, little ones who have no knowledge of good or evil. They have no true understanding as to their condition, evil. They have no understanding as to the remedy, what is good, what is right. They have no such knowledge. They exist then in a unique category.

Another way to look at it would be in Jeremiah 19:4 where infants being offered to Molech as burnt offerings, babies being burned on the fire in Gehenna, we talked about that a little bit ago, a place called Topheth...Topheth is what it was called because that's the Hebrew word for drum and they beat drums there all the time to drown out the screams of the burning babies. But they're referred to by Jeremiah in 19:4 as the blood of the innocent...the blood of the innocent. They are not the children of covenant parents, they are not the children of faithful parents. They're the children of people offering them to Molech. The faith, or lack of faith of their parents has no meaning. In God's eyes, their parents are shedding the blood of the innocence.

In Jonah chapter 4, when Jonah went to destroy Nineveh, instead to tell them we're going to be destroyed, and then God instead brought a revival when they repented. The book of Jonah closes in chapter 4 in verse 11 when God says, "Why would I destroy this city when there are a hundred and twenty thousand who don't know the right hand from the left?" Judgment is not appropriate in that sense on little ones. When does a child find out the difference between his right and his left? Three years old? It wouldn't be appropriate. They don't deserve that divine judgment.

In Ezekiel 16, Ezekiel is condemning the pagans who offered their children to Molech again it's the same thing. They to satisfy this horrendous demonic fabrication of a deity called Molech or Molach, sometimes, they burned their babies...they burned their babies. And in Ezekiel 16, God speaking of the babies of pagans said, "You're slaughtering My children...My children." This is very much like what we're looking at in Mark 10. God has a special place for these innocents, a special place for those He deems to be My children. These are not children of baptized believers, or covenant believers. These are the children of pagans.

And maybe one of the most interesting illustrations of all is in 2 Samuel chapter 12 where David, you remember, had a horrible sin with Bathsheba. She became pregnant, had a baby. He murdered her husband, in effect, by putting him in a place in the battle where he was going to be killed and isolating him. Well then God gave them that child, gave her that child and immediately God struck the child and the child died in its infancy. And when the child...before the child died when it was very ill, David was crying out to God and he was praying and he was pleading with God because he felt such overwhelming guilt for what he had done, murder and adultery, and all that, and he's praying out to God, 2 Samuel chapter 12. And he cries out to God and the baby dies. His prayer is not answered. The baby dies. And the folks who work with David had discussion. They said, "We better not say anything to him, we better not go in and tell him the baby died, because look how overwrought he was, how sad he was, how sorrowful he was when the baby was sick. Don't tell him the baby died, it will be worse."

Well they had to tell him and they went in and they said the baby died. Immediately he stopped his mourning. Stopped his sorrowing. Got up, washed his face, got dressed, came out, it was over. And he said this. "He cannot come to me, but I will go to him." He cannot come to me and I will go to him." I have actually read commentators who say David found comfort in the fact that he would be buried in the same cemetery as his son.

Are you kidding me? What kind of comfort is that? Not a whole lot of comfort to think about being buried in any place. That's not the point. David knew where he was going and he knew where that child was. How did he know where that child was? Because God had given him the confidence, the child had entered into His presence. This is not some strange doctrine. Children were considered in that unique category and when they died, they were gathered to God. If they didn't die, they grew

older, or hit the point of accountability and then were responsible for what was going on. They weren't saved before that, but God saved them when they died. David said, "He cannot come to me, I will go to him." Contrast that six chapters later in chapter 18 when Absalom, his wretched rebel son who tried to lead an a coup and destroy his own father and take away his Kingdom, died a horrible death, and David went into morning and he kept mourning and he kept mourning and, "O Absalom, Absalom." Chapter 18 ends, "O Absalom, Absalom." You go in to chapter 19, "O Absalom, Absalom, Absalom." And he just keeps moaning over this kid whose death was the right thing to happen to such a corrupt young man. And the difference was, he knew he would see the baby again, but he knew he would never see Absalom again. So David's confidence was that that child was in the presence of God.

In 1 Kings 14, King Jeroboam was a very wicked king and he...he led his people into profoundly wicked idolatry, terrible, terrible things. Again, perverse things, again he was offering children on the altar just horrible kinds of evil. So in 1 Kings 14, the judgment of God comes down on him and it is severe judgment. God is angry about his molten images. God is furious with him. And so in verse 10 of 1 Kings 14, He says, "I'm bringing calamity on the house of Jeroboam, I'll cut off from Jeroboam every male person, both bond and free in Israel. I'll make a clean sweep of the house of Jeroboam as one sweeps away dung until it's all gone. Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city, the dogs will eat and he who dies in the field, the birds of the heavens will eat for the Lord has spoken." I don't want any of them buried. I want their bodies desecrated and eaten as carrion, road kill, all of them.

Verse 12, "Now you arise, go to your house. When your feet enter the city, the child will die, a baby. All Israel shall mourn for him and bury him. Most interesting, for he alone of Jeroboam's family will come to the grave because in him something good was found toward the Lord God of Israel."

There was something different about a baby. Something good was found. What was good? He was the only one in Jeroboam's family who hadn't openly rebelled against God. Was he a sinner? Of course, all children are, all infants are, but he had not knowingly rebelled against God.

It's the same thing. There's a special place in God's care for those who are in infancy and not responsible for spiritual choices. And that's what we see in this passage and it's consistent through Scripture. As a confirmation from history, I'll read you a fairly good theologian by the name of John Calvin. He said this, "Those little 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," he's describing what Jesus did here. "It would be 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 arms and shut the door on them as strangers when He did not wish to forbid them."

This is not salvation, but this is a special care. And in the event that the child dies, I think the testimony of Scripture is that child receives salvation at the point of death because of God's sovereign grace. Another way to look at it is to understand that all babies that die are elect. They're all saved. Christ's sacrifice is applied to them all.

Charles Hodge, nineteenth century Presbyterian theologian wrote, "He tells us of such is the Kingdom of Heaven, as though heaven was in great measure composed of the souls of redeemed infants." No less a theologian than Benjamin Breckenridge(?), Warfield who graduated Princeton Seminary in 1876 wrote, "If all that are 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." Warfield also said, "Their destiny is determined irrespective of their choice by an unconditional decree of God, suspended for its execution on no act of their own." And that's why we say in terms of Reformed Theology, there isn't a greater illustration of sovereign grace and election than the salvation of a child that dies because the child can make no contribution. And that's a model for the salvation of anyone.

Warfield goes on to say, "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." Babies who die, he's saying, are elect from the foundation of the world. If only a single infant in 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 have entered into life by a non-Arminian pathway." So says Warfield.

So, when a baby dies, that baby is saved which means God providentially allowed that death because that's an elect baby. Do you understand the implications of this in countries that are full of Muslims and Hindus and Buddhists and every other kind of bizarre religion and we always worry about all the babies that die? They'll be in heaven. That's the glorious reality.

The point is that this great work of salvation for infants and children who die before the condition of accountability shows the special place they have in the Kingdom under the unique care of the King. Born sinners, object of wrath, but until they reject the truth consciously, they're His special care.

R.A. Webb addresses this in a book that he wrote in 1907 called, *The Theology of Infant Salvation.* He said 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 couldn't 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.

If babies that die go to hell, then they don't know why they're there, forever they don't know why they're there. It doesn't make sense.

So the Lord says then, in addition, in verse 15, "Truly I say to you, whoever doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child, will not enter it at all." Now He moves from saying children are in the Kingdom, to saying anybody else who comes in the Kingdom has to come like a child. You have to come the way children come, simple, open, trusting, unpretentious, dependent, weak, lacking achievement, humbly. And if you don't come like that, you'll never enter the Kingdom.

So our Lord says, "These babies go into the Kingdom purely by sovereign grace. They have nothing to commend themselves." And this is the greatest illustration of how everybody goes into the Kingdom who goes into the Kingdom. It's by sovereign grace, not because of your achievement. You have achieved no more than a baby could achieve. It's a gift of grace. And thus John Calvin wrote, "The passage gives Kingdom citizenship to both children and those who are like children."

And again, this is a severe rebuke to the Pharisees and their followers and all who fit into their system of legalism. This is a deathblow to legalism. Do you understand that? It's a powerful deathblow to legalism. The only possible way these children could ever be in heaven would be by sheer grace, right? Sheer grace, that's the only way anybody will ever be in heaven.

And then our Lord, in a wonderful gesture, punctuates the special place these children have in the Kingdom. Verse 16, "He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them." Mark's the only one that records that part. He didn't view them as little heathen, little pagans. He took them in His arms. It's a beautiful verb, it's a long verb, so I won't even pronounce it for you. But it's one of those compound verbs that means to enfold in your arms. Just like you would do a baby. He enfolded them, embraced them and began blessing them, *kataeulogia*, it's a compound word for eulogy or blessing in perfect tense, one by one by one by one by one and it's a very intense word. He pronounced intense blessing on them. He blessed them fervently, you could say, by praying for each one of them one at a time with His hands on them, a very familiar blessing posture. He seals the truth that He considered to be the most important truth, that salvation is by grace alone and the greatest illustration of that is the salvation of a child who dies before ever believing or rejecting the gospel.

Just another thought. The greatest blessing you can confer on your children is to lovingly evangelize them. That's your life priority cause when they get pass this point, you become the stewards of their lives. Their salvation is still a work of God but you are to be the agent by which that work is done.

You’re the primary missionary in the life of your children.

Father, again it’s Your Word that opens up the truth to us and gives us clarity and understanding. We thank You for it. How rich and wonderful it is to see the consistency of Scripture, the solidarity of Scripture, the lack of confusion. Just so beautifully fits together because You are the sole author and it is a supernatural book inspired by the Holy Spirit. We thank You for the encouragement of this truth. All of us perhaps have lost little ones, or know folks that have, or certainly we see them in the world around us and we understand how it’s been through all of history. It seems to be even true that the more false the religion, the more common the death of babies as You in Your sovereign grace rescue them out of that to bring them to glory. Thank You for the illustration of saving grace that comes only to those who come like children. Bring some today, Lord, some who are trying to earn their way. May they realize they can’t. May they throw themselves on Your mercy and Your grace. Help parents to receive the appropriate joy and confidence that their little ones while they’re little are in the hands of the Savior who unfolds His arms around them and keeps them through that period of time till they reach the age when they can make the decision. And if they should perish, He gathers them into His Kingdom. What a great hope that is,

But remind us of the responsibility that we all have for those children who grow to be faithful to lead them to Christ to grow in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We thank You in Your Son’s name. Amen.

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