

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

Children and the Kingdom of God, Part 2

Scripture: Luke 18:15-17

Code: 42-231

If you will open your Bible now to Luke chapter 18, we'll return to the passage in verses 15 through 17...Luke chapter 18, verses 15 through 17, and our second message on the subject, Children and the Kingdom of God...Children and the Kingdom of God.

We are all as parents, grandparents and relatives, all of us connected to families, tenderly disposed, are we not, toward little ones, drawn to them, to the fragile character of their lives, to be protectors of them, to enjoy their unconditional affection and love and the sheer joy that comes from their delightful presence. But more than just what comes to us by virtue of their life in this world, we are concerned about their eternal souls. And as parents and grandparents and Christians, we concern ourselves with children and their place in the Kingdom of God. And they carry our hearts in a very, very unique way do these little ones. And we want to understand how God views them. And the passage before us is critical to an understanding of just exactly how God views little ones in relation to His Kingdom.

Verse 15, "They were bringing even their babies to Him so that He might touch them. But when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them. But Jesus called for them saying, 'Permit the children to come to Me and do not hinder them, 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 shall not enter it at all.'"

A wonderfully, encouraging, comforting instructive statement from the lips of our Lord in verse 16, "The Kingdom of God belongs to such as these." How encouraging is that? How comforting is that? Just over the last number of hours through the middle of the night, Patricia and I have been in contact with a very beloved family in our church whose little nine-month-old grandson is in critical care, intensive care in the hospital in critical condition, having nearly drowned in the bathtub at home. This is an agonizing heart-wrenching experience for all in the family. And, of course, the rising question that the people ask, a question that cries out of their hearts is how are we to understand these little ones in relation to God? It just so happens that these folks, the Muxlows(?), Dave being an elder in our church, Susie well known, it's their little grandson, they're well informed with what the Word of God has to say about how God cares for the little ones, even in death. And we'll see more about that as we go.

It's a stark world in which we live, in which children are very fragile, the most fragile of all of us. I think back to September of two thousand and four, early in the month, the first few days of the month when some terrorists took children hostage in Bezlan(?), Russia, gathered them all into a gym and before

the massacre was over, three-hundred and sixty had died in the holocaust. Sixteen of them came from the evangelical church in Bezlan, fifteen of those sixteen were children, one was one of the teacher's in the school. Six of those fifteen children were children of the pastor's...pastor's family. And they turned to us because we're known in Russia, they turned to us for help and the Lord moved on your heart, they asked for a number of things, could we give them some help to understand and to help the families understand what happens when little children die. Well I had written this little book called Safe in the Arms of God, Truth from heaven about the death of a child, and they immediately took an English edition of that and translated it into Russian and distributed it to every family there who had lost a child and to many others in the community. And you made that possible with your generosity. They also took the book on The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness and translated that into Russian and distributed that to the parents so the parents could deal with the bitterness and the rage and the sense of vengeance that they had toward those who had done this to their children, and also highlighted in that book is the forgiveness that is offered in Jesus Christ which can produce a forgiving heart.

And then they came back to us and said that since the church had all the answers for these families, answers they couldn't find anywhere else, there was a new interest in the church, could we as a church help them build a bigger Sunday School building. And so you gave in excess of seventy-five thousand dollars which goes a long way over in Bezlan, Russia and they built the most beautiful Sunday-school building. I've seen pictures of it. And they are now conducting on-going classes for the families and the children there because the church through the Word of God had the answers to the cries of the hearts of the parents who lost their little ones. And the testimony of the pastors who had lost their own children solidified the theology, gave it flesh and made it highly believable.

When you look at the Word of God and you ask the question, "How does God view little ones? How does God view babies? In what sense do they belong to His Kingdom?" You're asking a question then that sooner or later is going to be on your heart and my heart, if not, very frequently through our lives. And what you find in general as you pull it all together in the Bible is that the Lord's heart is very tender toward children, very tender toward little ones. One of the most endearing passages in all the Bible is found in the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel, I'll just read it to you. Ezekiel chapter 16, the Lord is describing how He picked up Israel, how He made Israel His child, as it were, how He chose the Israelites to be His special people and He likens them to an infant abandoned in a field. When somebody in ancient times didn't want a baby, they just took the baby and threw the baby in the open field and let the animals eat the flesh of the unwanted little one. Well God likens Israel to that in Ezekiel 16 starting in verse 4. "As for your nativity...or your birth...on the day you were born, your navel cord was not cut," which is to say no one attended to you, "nor were you washed in water to cleanse you. You were not rubbed with salt," which they did as a way to disinfect, "you were not wrapped in swaddling cloths, no eye pitied you to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you, but you were thrown out into the open field when you yourself was loathed on the day you were born." This is an outrageous kind of behavior and is an offense, of course, to God in reality, but it's a wonderful metaphor for the condition of Israel, unloved, unwanted, left, as it were, to perish. And

then God says this, "When I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live,' yes I said to you in your blood, 'Live.' I made you thrive like a plant in the field. You grew and matured and became very beautiful."

In this passage, God makes it very clear that He has called Israel to be His own from its very origin. He has loved His people from their infancy, like an orphaned and exposed baby. And what was true metaphorically for Israel is true for all children who belong to God as well. His gracious love for little children in general becomes a fitting picture for His unique love for Israel. Scripture affirms again and again two basic truths. God considers all babies to belong to Him. And God considers them before Him as innocent. Therefore He maintains a special care for them. And in some unique sense, gracious to be sure, the kingdom of God belongs to them. That is, they are under the rule and the care of God.

Further in that sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel, God indicts the Jews of Jerusalem for their idolatry and their idolatry was severe. It is a promise of coming judgment. And the judgment was deserved in verses 20 to 22 of Ezekiel 16. This is what God says to them through the prophet Ezekiel, "You took your sons and your daughters whom you bore to Me." Stop right there. You took your sons and your daughters whom you bore to Me. You had them but they were born to Me. Here is God laying claim to all children. "These you sacrificed," they were literally offered on the altar to Molech, incinerated, offered as burnt offerings to idols. God says, "Were your acts of harlotry a small matter that you have slain My children?" They're not His children because they are the children of believing Jews, they are His children because they exist. And even though they are the children of non-believers, Molech worshipers, they are still His. "And in all your abominations and acts of harlotry, you did not remember the days of your youth when you were naked and bare struggling in your blood." I picked you up when you were a little child. That shows My compassion toward you when you were like a child and helpless and exposed to danger and you have taken My children, the children that belonged to Me, and you have caused them...He says..to pass through the fire. You have incinerated them to appease false gods.

With those words of judgment fulfilled in the Babylonian captivity through Ezekiel, God laid full claim to being the possessor of the innocent children. They were born to Me, He says, you have slain My children. For His innocent children, God feels great compassion. And this passage before us in Luke 18 really is a jewel in the crown of God, if you will, that shines brightly on all those who love little children. It's a source of great encouragement, a great comfort to all of us and it teaches us in just a few words how God views our little ones. It's one of those important, very brief passages that is so important, it appears in Matthew, Mark and Luke. And the occasion, as we saw last time, was that Jesus was talking to a very large crowd, initially the subject in the Matthew and Mark account clearly was about marriage, divorce, remarriage, singleness. So marriage and family was the issue and this discussion came into that kind of context. In the Luke account, Luke precedes it with a presentation of a parable that Jesus gave about who is qualified to be in the Kingdom. Who belongs in the Kingdom

and to whom does the Kingdom belong?

And what we learned was that it doesn't belong to the self-righteous, it doesn't belong to the spiritually elite. It doesn't belong to moral, spiritual, religious achievers. It doesn't belong to those who pursue it by works and self-righteousness, like the Pharisee who trusted in himself that he was righteous and viewed others with contempt. Who went into the temple to pray and thanked God that he wasn't like other people, pronouncing before God his supposed holiness and suitability to be in the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom doesn't belong to him. He didn't go home justified, but rather the other did who was a tax gatherer, the lowest of the low in the social ranking, who knew of his own wretchedness and sinfulness, wouldn't even lift up his eyes to heaven, pounded on his breast signifying the wretchedness of his own heart, says, "God please apply the atonement to me, the sinner." And Jesus says of that man, he went down to his house justified because the Lord only saves those who are humble, not those who are spiritually proud.

So the discussion has been who is going to be in the Kingdom? To whom does the Kingdom belong? It belongs to the lowly, the humble. And with that in mind, the transition is very easy because the lowliest of the lowly would be a child. Children cannot achieve anything morally. They cannot achieve anything spiritually. They cannot achieve anything religiously. We are talking about children who are below the condition of accountability which is differing ages for differing children, but the condition of accountability. We're talking about children who are below that condition who are not responsible, who are not held culpable by God. These kinds of children have a special place in God's Kingdom and they're the very opposite of a Pharisee, very opposite of the self-righteous, very opposite of the religious elite. They haven't achieved anything in their...they're just the most perfect illustration of the kind of person that enters the Kingdom. That's why it says in verse 17, that for anybody to receive the Kingdom, he has to come like a child. This is a very, very strong rebuke of Pharisaic religion, a very strong rebuke of any religion of human achievement of elite self-righteousness, legalism, earning one's salvation.

So, the Lord makes it clear that the Kingdom belongs to the lowly and the humble. The Kingdom belongs to those who have no merit, no achievement, no moral, no spiritual and no religious achievement, those who cannot on their own do anything to earn salvation...it belongs to them. And none are a better illustration of those kind than children who have achieved nothing. And so what you have here is an indication that in a very special way, those who are least capable of doing anything to please God are in the special care of God. The best illustration of someone who belongs to the Kingdom is a baby who hasn't and can't achieve anything.

Look at the text again just ever so briefly. They brought babies to Him in verse 15, *brephos*, infants, nursing children that He might touch them, a symbol of prayer, calling on God to bless them. Common in their experience. They would take their little ones to the synagogues and have the elders to the very same thing, they would take them to the priests at the temple and have them do the same

thing. Why? Because parents are concerned about the future spiritual life of their children. It's a very religious society. They wanted their children in the Kingdom of God. They wanted their children to obey the Law of God. And so they were deeply concerned as any parent would be for children to follow the path that their parents believed was a true way to heaven. But you notice the disciples, it says in verse 15, seeing this began rebuking them...strong term, *epitimao*, they censured them, they reprimanded them. They had been infected by the Pharisaic religion that said you earn your salvation, therefore salvation doesn't belong to children because children can't earn it because they can't do anything to earn it. And so children being outside of the covenant of God in the view of...or outside of the Kingdom of God in the view of the disciples should be shunned and so they rebuked the parents. Jesus responded, verse 16, "Jesus called for them." In Mark 10:14 the parallel passage, says He was very indignant, He was furious with this theological misunderstanding. And he says here in this text, "Permit the children to come to Me, let them come and do not hinder them. Let them come. Don't ever forbid them." Why? "For the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Not to these, that would be one word, *touton*, but to such as these, *ton toiouton*, different altogether. To those who are in this category, the Kingdom of God belongs.

Does that mean they're not sinful? No, they're sinful. Are they fallen? Yes, they're fallen and it's manifestly true, is it not? You are very aware of the fallenness of your children. But they are not able to make moral, spiritual responsible choices. They do not understand nor can they, law and grace, judgment and gospel. They fall into the category of innocence under special divine compassion and care. And as I told you last time, this means this is a wonderful opportunity, a wonderful time for you while they are children they're under this special care, before the attitudes of rebellion against the gospel, and rebellion against the Lord begin to rise and flourish and develop. This is your best time to do evangelism. It's the best time even to do the evangelism that we do with children who are non-Christian families, for while they are not graced by their parents in any way, they are still under the special care of God and have an openness and a susceptibility to respond to the gospel and so outreach to children is a very important, important ministry of evangelism.

A good way to see that in illustration is turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 7...1 Corinthians chapter 7. And then verse 13, we're talking here about an issue that came up in the Corinthian church, probably came up all over the place in the early church, and it is this, somebody comes to Christ, saved out of a pagan environment, you come to the Lord. Or even saved out of a Jewish environment. You become a Christian. Let's say you're the wife and you've believed the gospel and the preaching of the apostles has reached your heart and the Spirit of God has quickened you. You've become alive. You've repented, exercised faith. You are now not only justified but you are regenerated, you are a new creation in Christ and now you're married to a non-Christian husband, or a non-Christian wife. Immediate question is, do I divorce this non-Christian? Am I unequally yoked? Is this light linked to darkness? Is this Christ and Belial linked together as Paul speaks of later in his ministry to the Corinthians? Is this something I need to get out of? Am I going to be corrupted by this? Is the purity of Christ going to be corrupted by this? If...if I am to be solely devoted to Christ and set apart, am I going

to be somehow evil...evilly influenced by having a non-Christian spouse? And then the other thought came along was this...what about my children? If I'm a Christian and my husband is not a Christian, are my children going to be polluted by the presence of a non-Christian in the family and do I need to get out of this situation and get my children out of this situation in order to protect them from the evil influences of the unregenerate spouse And so Paul answers that in verse 13, "A woman who has an unbelieving husband and he consents to live with her, let her not send her husband away." That's a technical word for divorce, don't divorce your non-Christian husband, don't divorce him. Verse 15 says, "If the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave. You're not under bondage." If he wants to go, let him go. If it's his choice to divorce you and leave, let him leave. But don't you do that. Why? Verse 14, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife." He's not talking about salvation. Not all unbelieving spouses come to salvation, right? That's not what he's saying. He's simply saying it's the reverse of what you thought. You thought you might be polluted by the presence of a non-believer and I will tell you this, that greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world, therefore the power of God and the grace of God manifest in your life will take the dominant place in that union, in that relationship so that instead of you being influenced by evil by him, he will be influenced by you for the grace and power of God becomes the dominant force. That's the point. Rather than the unbelieving husband being unsanctified through...or having an unsanctified influence on the wife, the opposite is true and reversed, the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband.

Now what kind of sanctification are we talking about? The word simply means there's a certain degree of cleansing, a certain degree of purity, a certain degree of separation from evil. In other words, a Christian spouse in a marriage mitigates the full force of uncleanness or evil. You have a non-Christian marriage, you have unmitigated evil. You have the world, the flesh, the devil and you have nothing that mitigates that whatsoever. It is undiluted. When you put a Christian into that environment that is mitigated to some degree. You're talking here about marital sanctification, in a sense, or familial sanctification, not spiritual, salvific sanctification. The point here is you will have a positive effect in that your very presence in that intimate environment in the home and in the marriage, your presence as the power and grace of God and the blessing of God flows through your life will mitigate evil in that home and therefore have a sanctifying effect in the temporal sense, the earthly sense on your unbelieving spouse.

And then at the end of verse 14, "For otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy." The word holy is the same word as sanctified, exactly separated. What does this mean? If you're worried about your children, your children would be unclean in a non-Christian home. If both parents are non-Christians, there is a level of unmitigated evil that dominates that house because God is not there in His power and in His grace. But when one is a believer, the children no longer are under the full impact of the uncleanness of an unregenerate life, but it is mitigated so they now enjoy a certain degree of separation from that by the presence of a believing parent. So Paul is saying...Look, don't divorce your partner simply because you think you're going to become unclean because your partner is not saved, the opposite will happen. Your relationship to God and the blessing that comes to your

life through that will have an effect on him that is positive. And don't worry about your children like you had to grab your kids and run, because let's say you have an unbelieving husband. You stay there and the work of God through your life will have a mitigating impact on the children and what would normally be whole unclean influence will be mitigated by the clean influence of regeneration and sanctification in your life. Little children are influenced even by one Christian parent.

So, summing it up we could say this. All children...all children who are under the condition of accountability are in some way in the special care of God. There is a special concern with which God views them. Children who have one Christian parent have an additional blessing of the power and grace of God that flows through that Christian parent that creates a certain separation from all that is unclean. Children who have two Christian parents then have that mitigated to its most serious or most extensive degree. God has a special love for little ones. This is a great time to seek to evangelize the children of unsaved parents and come alongside what God is also doing in their hearts. Those children who have one Christian parent are even more susceptible to the good things of God that can lead them to faith. And those who are the children of two believing parents even more.

So, simply to understand that, I think, helps perhaps to understand how important it is to evangelize children when these influences are at their maximum level. Do all children grow up to believe? No. Do all children of saved parents grow up to believe? No. Do all children of one Christian spouse grow up to believe? No they don't...they don't. But we have to make the maximum effort to evangelize them, to gospelize them all through those early years when that influence is at its strongest.

How do we know that God really specially cares for little children? What is the major point of evidence? And this is where we ended up last week. The answer to that question is this, the evidence of their special place in the Kingdom is most manifest when children die...when children die. In fact, you can make an argument that that's exactly what Jesus is talking about. Go back to Luke 18, that when He says of such is the Kingdom of God, He is primarily talking about those in that category of children who die. I think it's broader than that, but you could argue that it's the children that die because that is certainly true of them. The Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I think God does care for all children in a special way, but savingly in behalf of those who die. And that, of course, is the great evidence of His unique care.

What I mean by that is when an infant dies, or a child dies before reaching the condition of accountability, I think Scripture gives us enough insight to be sure that they are saved, they are gathered together by God into His presence, just as God in Isaiah 40 gathers the little lambs and carries them. I think God has a special affection for them and when they die He gathers them into His presence. And I want to show you how I think the Scripture lays that out for us.

In Deuteronomy chapter 1, I'll just read this verse to you, you don't need to look it up. It says this, "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." Here I just want to grab that one phrase, "They have no knowledge of good or evil. They have no true understanding of good or evil." That's pretty significant. They don't know what's right and they don't know what's wrong. Therefore they have no sense of law. They have no sense of disobedience. They have no sense of guilt. There is no conscious rebellion against the Law of God. There is no understanding of the Law of God. There is no legitimately activated conscience to bring about conviction. They are therefore not responsible moral agents. They are not culpable for the actions that they do because they don't know what is right or what is wrong. And that is exactly what Scripture says. That's why in Jeremiah 2:34 and Jeremiah 19:4 they are called innocents...innocents. They are in the eyes of God innocent. And if God says someone is innocent, that is a pretty significant thing for Him to say. And He doesn't throw that word around. It is used for those who are little children. In the cases of Jeremiah, for those children that were offered on the altars to Molech and were burned in the fire, they were innocent. God's designation, not mine.

R.A. Webb, writing back in 1907 a book called *The Theology of Infant Salvation* was published by the Presbyterian Committee on Publishing, said this, "If a dead infant were sent to hell on no other account than that of a original sin, having inherited the Adamic sin nature, there would be a good reason to the divine mind for that judgment because sin is a reality." In other words, there would be reason for God to send a dead infant to hell, just on the basis of the fact that he possessed a sinful nature.

"But," writes Webb, "The child's mind would be a perfect blank as to the reason of its suffering. Under such circumstances it would know suffering but it would have no understanding of the reason for its suffering. It could not tell itself why it was so awfully smitten and consequently the whole meaning of its sufferings being to it a conscious enigma, the very essence of the penalty would be absent and justice would be disappointed and cheated of its validation."

Well said. What is the hell and what is the remorse of someone who has no understanding of why he or she is even there?

At the end of the prophet Jonah in chapter 4 and verse 11, God says, "I am withholding judgment on Nineveh." And He gives us a reason why and this reason reiterates again this same divine perspective. "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh? Withholding judgment? The great city in which there are more than 120 thousand persons who don't know the difference between their right and left hand? Why would I destroy a city in which there are 120 thousand children who are not mature enough to know the difference between their right and left hand?" And that's speaking metaphorically of the same thing we read in Deuteronomy 1:39, the difference between what is right and what is wrong. That's why God says in Ezekiel 16, "They're My children...they're My children."

When, you remember, in Job's situation the calamity had fallen upon him and the calamity was so staggering that it left him in the horror of all horrors. He had lost absolutely every one he loved and

everything he had. And he opened his mouth in Job 3:1, he cursed the day of his birth. Why did I have to be born? But down in verse 11 he says, "Why didn't I die at birth? Why didn't I just come forth in the womb and expire? Why wasn't I stillborn? Why did the 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 them. I would have been at rest." I think Job is saying there even in this primitive book in terms of chronology of the Scriptures, back in the patriarchal time, that it would have been better to be still born than to enter into heavenly rest...the confidence of heavenly rest. He goes on to talk about the various kinds of people who would enter into that rest. Has to be a heavenly rest.

Job didn't believe that when you die you went out of existence because Job says, "Though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God whom I shall see for myself and not another." Job knew that His Redeemer lived and he lived as well in the life to come and Job is not saying if I died at birth I would have gone out of existence. And he's certainly not saying I would have gone to hell...I would have gone to rest.

But perhaps the most helpful of illustrations in the Old Testament is found in 2 Samuel, 2 Samuel chapter 12 and it's worth a brief consideration, 2 Samuel chapter 12. David, you remember, had lusted after Bathsheba and David worked a situation where he could get Uriah, her husband, out in the middle of the battle and the troops would pull away and leave him exposed and the enemy would kill him and that way after he had literally contracted with his soldiers to bring about the death of Uriah, he could take Bathsheba to be his wife. And he did that. And it was a horrific sin, as you know. She became pregnant, she had a little baby boy. Nathan the prophet comes to him in verse 13 of 2 Samuel 12 and he says in the middle of the verse, after David said I've sinned against the Lord, Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has taken away your sin, you shall not die." The Lord forgives him because of his confession. "However, because of this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child that is born to you shall surely die." The child's going to die, new little infant. "Nathan went to his house, then the Lord struck the child that Uriah's widow bore to David so that he was very sick." The Lord struck that little child. "And David therefore inquired of God for the child. David fasted, went lay all night on the ground." Just prone all night praying, fasting for the life of the child. "The elders of his household stood beside him in order to raise him up from the ground." Trying to lift him up and get him to bed and gave...take something to eat. He was unwilling, wouldn't eat food with them. "Then it happened on the seventh day," seven days he did this for this child, "the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead for they said, 'Behold, while the child was still alive we spoke to him and he didn't listen to our voice, how then can we tell him that the child is dead since he might do himself harm?'" They thought he was so remorseful, they'd never seen him like this, seven days of this, they thought he might do something to kill himself when he found out the child was dead.

"But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David perceived that the child was dead so David said to his servants, 'Is the child dead?' And they said, 'He's dead.' So David arose

from the ground, washed, anointed himself, changed his clothes, came into the house of the Lord and worshiped." What? That seems like an inappropriate response. All that remorse when the child was sick and now you clean up, you stop fasting, you stop praying and you worship when the child is dead? It sounds like the remorse should have gone even to a deeper level, right? If you were seven days prone when the child was just sick, maybe you should be fourteen days prone when the child has died. But just the opposite. He gets up, cleans up, anoints himself, put on the appropriate fragrances, changed his clothes, came to the house of the Lord and worshiped, came to his own house when he requested...by the way, the worship is an offering of thanks to God. He goes to his house, they set food before him and he ate. And his servants said to him, "What is this thing that you have done? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, when the child died you rose and ate food?" And 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. Now he's died, why should I fast, can I bring him back again?" And then this confident statement, "I shall go to him, he will not return to me." We'll meet again, I'll go to him. Did David know where he was going? Of course he knew where he was going. It was David who said one day he would die and awake in the likeness of his God. He would not be content until he would awake in His likeness. He knew that one day he would pass through the grave, he would not see corruption, just as his greater Son the Messiah would not see corruption, but would see God. He knew where he was going. He's not saying, "I'm going to be buried in a plot next to him." He doesn't say I'm going to the same graveyard. He doesn't say I'm going to die like he died. There's no comfort in that. There's no resolution in that. There's no end to grief in that. He is saying there will be a reunion. "He cannot come to me, but I will go to him."

Contrast that with the eighteenth chapter of 2 Samuel...2 Samuel chapter 18. David had another son that also died. This is an adult son by the name of Absalom. And in the eighteenth chapter, you can go all the way down about verse 33, right at the very end of the chapter, the king was deeply moved, verse 33, went to his chamber over the gate and wept. Thus he said as he walked, "O my son, Absalom, O my son, my son, Absalom, would I have died instead of you. O Absalom, my son, my son." This morbid kind of melancholy. It was told Joab, who was his general, "Behold the king is weeping and mourns for Absalom." It's hard for them to figure out because Absalom was leading a coups against his father. And the victory that day was turned to mourning." They had put down the coups and they couldn't have a party because David was in this mourning mode, and when all the people heard it, they said, "The son is...the king is grieved for his son. So the people went by stealth into the city that day as people who are humiliated steal away when they flee in battle." Isn't that amazing? Instead of being able to celebrate, they all kind of snuck around in a...in a melancholy attitude trying to convey some level of sympathy with their heart-broken king.

Verse 4, "The king covered his face, cried with a loud voice, 'O my son, Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son.' Joab came into the house of the king and said," Joab just gives this guy a wake-up call. "Today you have covered with shame the faces of all your servants who today have saved your life and the lives of your sons and daughters, the lives of your wives and lives of your concubines." All

these people went out and fought this battle and won on your behalf and you're making a fool out of all of them by loving those who hate you. How can you show this kind of mournful love for this rebel son and by hating those who love you? You will not let them enter into joy. You will not participate in the joy of their triumph which was on your behalf, for you've shown today that princes and servants are nothing to you, for I know this day that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today then you'd be pleased. You'd rather have Absalom alive and everybody dead. Wow.

Why this remorse? Totally different response then when his baby son died, right? When his baby son died, he cleaned up, worshiped the Lord, went on with life cause he knew where he was. When Absalom died, he mourned and he mourned and he mourned and he mourned because he also knew where Absalom was. And he knew the little one was in a place where he would go and meet him again. And Absalom was in a place where he would never go and see him again. Very different situations.

In 1 Kings chapter 14, one more Old Testament illustration, in 1 Kings chapter 14, King Jeroboam, very wicked king, King Jeroboam...it's a wonderful, wonderful account here. Oh he was so wicked, he brought idols into the land of God's people. And he offered children to idols. Because of his wickedness, God said I'm going to destroy your whole family, your whole dynasty. It's over. It's done with. Go down to verse 10, 1 Kings 14, "I'll bring calamity on the house of Jeroboam. I will cut off...means to kill... from Jeroboam every male person, both bond and free, in Israel." Every male connected to the guy's family would be killed. 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. No funerals will be allowed. I'm going to kill them all and none of them can have a funeral. Leave them in the street for the dogs to eat. And he who dies out in the field, the birds of the heavens, the carrion birds will eat, for the Lord has spoken. Now you arise, go to your house. When your feet enter the city, the child will die.

There was a newborn child in the family. The child will die. And all Israel shall mourn for him and bury him. Nobody gets a funeral but the baby for he alone of Jeroboam's family shall come to the grave. He's the only one allowed to be buried because in him something good was found toward the Lord God of Israel. Wow. What? Something good was found toward the Lord God of Israel. What was that? That he had not knowingly rebelled against God. He was in the category of not knowing the difference between right and wrong, not knowing metaphorically his right hand from his left. He was in the category of an innocent. And even though he belonged to a family full of wretched, vile, blasphemous idolaters, he belonged to God and the something good in him was the absence of a full rebellion against God. Give him and only him the proper funeral.

Now back to Luke 18. So what are we saying? There's a special place in the Kingdom for little ones. It is manifest most clearly in what happens to the little ones that die. And so you understand this? And through the history of the world, the death of infants is massive? Some, and I don't know how you

make any kind of calculations like this, but some have suggested that probably the eternal heaven will be populated more by children who were taken to heaven in their death than by adults. High mortality rates in pagan countries reflect the compassion and the grace of God.

So, the Lord Jesus picks up these little ones and blesses them and says concerning them, "The Kingdom of God belongs to such as these." When a baby dies, he goes to heaven. The ones that don't die, they're under some special care, not salvation, but some special care. When they reach the condition of accountability, then they have to make choices and they stand or fall on those choices. But until then, they're under a special compassionate care that God has surrounded them with which makes them more susceptible because open rebellion hasn't broken out to the gospel. You can watch that with your children. It's one thing for them to be, I guess you could say disobedient in general, one thing for them to be obstinate. It's one thing for them to be self-willed. That's natural. That's Adamic. That's sinful. But it's something else for them to resent the gospel. And that comes a lot later. You need to work the gospel into their little hearts in those early years when they're fallen, yes, but it hasn't blossomed into open rebellion so that there's something good toward the Lord still there. And you as a single Christian parent with an unsaved spouse, you bring an increasingly sanctifying influence. And two Christian parents and even more increasingly sanctifying influence toward those little ones.

Now some of you are probably thinking...are you the only person that believes this kind of thing? And I want to help you with that a little. No, my wife believes this...don't you? Told you. My kids believe it. But so did John Calvin, honey, so you're in good company, just want you to know that. Listen to what Calvin said. "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. It would be cruel to exclude that age from the grace of redemption. It is an irreligious audacity to drive from Christ those whom He held in His bosom and to shut the door on them as strangers when He did not wish to forbid them at all."

It was the great Charles Hodge, the nineteenth century Presbyterian theologian who wrote this. "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 then B.B. Warfield, the Princeton theologian said this, "If all that die in infancy are saved, it can only be 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." And then Warfield went on to say this, "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 their salvation is wrought...says Warfield...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...and it does...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

predestinated to salvation from the foundation of the world," end quote. Warfield says if babies die, they were elect...they were elect.

And then he went on to say this. "If only a single infant dying, a single infant dying is saved, the whole Arminian principle is traversed because an infant had to be saved, any infant that is saved without any works. If all infants dying such as...such are saved, not only the majority of the saved, but doubtless the majority of the human race have entered into heaven...I like this...by a non-Arminian pathway." That is salvation by the power of God and the grace of God.

You say, "Well isn't it necessary for them to have faith?" This is a special dispensation of God belongs to them and also, I think, to those that are mentally disabled to the point where they never get beyond infancy. But when they die, those who cannot reject, they are gathered to the Lord. So we say only elect babies and children die, the rest grow up and then God's gracious election works itself out in adulthood. So the point is that this great work of salvation for infants and for children who die before the condition of accountability shows us the special place that children have in the Kingdom of God. They are under the care of the King so much so that should they die He gathers them into heaven. Again they are sinners, but they are not objects of divine wrath. Our Lord then moves from this reality to a familiar analogy. Okay? From the reality to the analogy. We end with verse 17, just briefly.

"Truly I say to you...truly I say," this is a truism oft stated, Matthew 18:3, Matthew 19:14, Mark 10:15, familiar words. "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all." These little ones provide the best illustration of how you are saved. You are saved by divine sovereign grace invading your life when you know you have nothing that you have done. You have achieved nothing morally. You have achieved nothing spiritually. You have achieved nothing religiously that can merit your salvation. And like a child, simple, open, trusting, unpretentious, dependent, weak, lacking any achievement, you come to the Kingdom. And if you don't come that way, you don't come at all. Calvin understood the dual reality of these very important though brief verses. He said the passage gives Kingdom citizenship both to children and those who are like children. God saves all whom He saves by sovereign grace through an operation of the Holy Spirit illustrated magnificently in the salvation of children that die when they are at the moment of that death saved. And we are also saved by sovereign grace, even the ability to believe and repent is a gift of God's grace to us.

And so, special place of children in the Kingdom. When they die, they're gathered to Him. When they live, they're the most fertile ground for evangelism before all the rebellion and resistance to the gospel develops.

So what do you do as a parent to maximize those years to bring your children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Let me just make three suggestions. Teach them...teach them. They have

limited knowledge, we've heard that. They don't know right from wrong, good from evil. Teach them. They have limited reasoning power. They have virtually no discretion. They must be taught. They must be taught. Paul celebrates the wonderful work of the parent, the mother and grandmother of Timothy when in 2 Timothy 3:15 he says that from childhood, from *brephos*, same word as baby, from babyhood you've known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation. And that points out that they weren't...they aren't saved just because they're babies, they're in special care. If they die He saves them. They're under special compassion and care. But when you teach them, you give them the knowledge of the sacred writings which grants them the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Teach your children. Teach your children. Teach them the Word of God. Put them in an environment where others are teaching them the Word of God. That's one of the blessings of this church. Couldn't have your children in a better place than in Grace Community Church with this commitment we have to the instruction we give to children in this church environment.

Secondly, model the truth that you hold them to. It doesn't do any good to tell them it's good for them if it's not for you. That kind of hypocrisy is counter-productive totally. You tell them this is the truth and then you show them how important it is by living it. You must be aware absolutely the personal value of truth for your own sake, not just for the sake of your children. You can't expect your children to really believe something is right if you don't demonstrate that same conviction. Their perceptive spirits will see through your hypocrisy when you're doing something to engineer or manipulate them to respond in a certain way instead of authentic parenting, instead of authentic godly living according to the truth that allows your children to see the freedom and the joy and the blessing that comes when you walk in God's truth. You pass the truth on in teaching and you live it.

And then thirdly, let me suggest that you love your children. What do I mean by that? Let them know your heart is on them. Be affectionate, tender, compassionate, sensitive, sacrificial, generous. Weep with them, laugh with them, sacrifice for them. Protect them from all the avenues of harm that can come into their lives. Don't provoke them. Don't exasperate them. Be utterly unselfish. Serve your children. Show them by your actions that the things that matter to them matter to you and sometimes the things that matter to them matter more to you than the things that are important in your world. Reward them when they do well. Make your home a joyful place. Do fun things with them. Love them.

So you teach them and you model what you teach in an environment of love. And when you train a child in this way, and he gets old he will not depart from it, Proverbs 22:6. May God help us to lead our little ones in these sensitive years into the full salvation in Christ.

Father, we thank You for again the power of the truth to penetrate, captivate our hearts with the wonder of reality. We are so glad we live in reality, not a fog. We know the truth. We walk in the truth. We love the truth. We're informed by the truth as to our conduct and our behavior. We view the world through the lens of biblical truth. We thank You so much, Father, for this. We love our little ones,

precious they are, tender they are to us. We're so glad that You love them in a special way. We're so thankful that You care for them and that should they die they will live forever. But, O Lord, in our culture they live, and they live into adulthood and responsibility before You. May we as parents do everything we can, everything we can to make the gospel gloriously, beautifully, sweetly attractive to them so that the most natural thing for them to do, even though it's fully supernatural, is to step toward Christ in faith. Work that work in the children in our families and we'll give You the glory forever. Amen.

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