

“Eternity: What Awaits After Death”

Sermon # 7

“What About the Children?”

For the last six weeks we have been exploring the subject of “Eternity: What Awaits After Death.” It is one thing to talk about the death of adults but what about the children. Surely one of the most heartbreaking events a person can experience is the death of a child. And when this happens we are faced with the question, “What about the children who die before they are old enough to make a decision for themselves? And what of those who are mentally disabled and therefore incapable of making such a decision. What happens to them?”

This message is for all those who have lost a baby and for all those of you who will be called upon to minister to someone who has lost a baby. If someone were to ask you, “Is My Baby In Heaven?” how would you respond? If you haven’t faced that question yet, no doubt you will. As believers we are tempted to simply answer, “They are in Heaven!” But do we have or could we give any Scriptural justification for such a belief.

John MacArthur in his book “Safe In Arms of Jesus” discusses the responses given to a couple that had lost a baby. The response should make our skin crawl and we should cringe at the callousness of some of responses. First, he points out that very few of their friends and neighbors ever mentioned the birth of the baby to the couple. Which is bad in itself, most people need reassurance that their child mattered in the lives of others. They want to talk about their child they just don’t want to make you uncomfortable. Saying the child’s name does not bring anything to their minds that they have not thought of! This is the part of their life. If they cry, don’t be uncomfortable, hurt with them.

The wife of one couple that came to visit to the young mother said, “It was for the best, dear. It’s best you forget this ever happened. We don’t need to talk about it again.” Another woman said to her, “It’s too bad you let the baby get so cold.” The young mother said up to that point she had not even considered that her baby’s death might some-how be her fault. Do the things we say, make those who are suffering, suffer more?

But the young mother said that the worst thing that was said to her was not something said to her but something that she overheard being say to her husband, “God must not have wanted your wife to have a daughter.” My what a callous and cold-hearted thing to say

“This young couple’s family, friends and church family ought to have comforted them with answers from the Bible rather than questions about why God allowed the child to die and whether they were in some way to blame.” [John MacArthur. “Safe In the Arms of God: Truth From Heaven About The Death Of A Child. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003) pp. 9-10]

Let me give a little advice to those who are called to minister to the grieving, weigh your words carefully. Some of the things that I want to say apply to those who are grieving the loss of a child or those who are grieving the loss of some other loved one. Just because things are true, does not mean they need to be said. Some times in trying to say something spiritually helpful we are just insensitive.

Some attempt to offer comforting words like, "God has a plan" or "God will really use your testimony," or "It must have been Gods will." Like hearing that will make them want to stop grieving now. Yes, it is Gods will, but that doesn't make it pretty, or fun. Jesus death was horrific, it was terrifying, it was unimaginably painful, it was not ok. It was not wonderful; it was wondrous. Nothing takes that pain from the cross. The resurrection was a separate action and very much a wonderful event, an event that gives us hope of a future in heaven with Christ.

Since this is a tragedy that our family has just experienced with the death of little Aubrey our first grandchild I asked my daughter Nikki to read what I had written and to give me her input, which she graciously did. She wrote of this experience when she said, "Aubrey's death was horrible, nothing changes that. Anything good that comes from this will be a separate miracle, a grace of God. Any comfort I can give another grieving mother, or any encouragement I can be, is a miracle apart from her death, it does not lessen it in any way, shape, or form. I needed to be reminded of that. It resounded with my heart. I will never look back on this and say it was good. I will never be able to say that I would have chosen this way, I will never agree with this part of the plan. But maybe someday, I will be able to see the separate miracles, the graces along the way that are good. I will grieve, and I will go through the pain, not around it. I will not pretend like it didn't hurt. I will endure the pain and let God do this thing in me, whatever this thing is. And maybe, just maybe, I'll come through this time looking a little bit more like Jesus."

There are no central Bible passages that clearly address this sensitive issue, but there are a number of passages that can help us come to an understanding what I believe is the message of God's Word. This morning I want to share with you three resounding principles that I believe will answer the question, "Is My Baby In Heaven?"

First, The Concern of the Father

It is no accident that God is referred to in the Bible as our "Heavenly Father." The heart of our father God is repeatedly revealed by Scripture

Notice about the heart of our father

- God Designs Every Human Life.

Any discussion of "What About the Children" has to begin with the all important statement that the Bible says that life begins at the moment of conception. Every life conceived is a person. The Bible is very clear on this point. Any death that occurs after the moment of

conception is the death of a person. And persons have eternal souls. They are not anonymous masses of tissue, they are not simply fetus' they are babies. That life begins at conception is attested to by the fact that God knows us even from the womb in Jeremiah 1:5 we are told,

“Before I formed you in the belly I knew you: and before you were born I sanctified you....”

The Psalmist tells us that God has designed the unborn (Psalm 139:13-16) “You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb. (14) Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous – and how well I know it. (15) You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. (16) You saw me before I was ever born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day passed.” (NLT)

God not only Designs Every Human Life,

- God Values Every Human Life

Every baby is marvelous fashioned in the image of the creator. Even the fact that some babies never enjoy life outside the womb does not erase that their life is sacred. Because every human bears the image of God, every human life from the point of conception is sacred. The Bible says, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness:...So God made man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them.” (Gen 1:26-27)

God sets forth HUMAN LIFE on a plane above all other life. It is Unique, Distinctive and Valuable. Of Humans alone does he say that they “bear his image.” Every tiny life bears the image of God and is sacred in his sight.

In the book of Genesis when God created man it says that he “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (2:7). Every human being has a living soul, a soul that has the capacity to spend eternity with God.

God Values Every Human Life ...

- God Distinguishes Between Children And Adults.

There are many biblical examples that God does not hold children responsible for the sins of their parents. One such example is that God allowed the Israelite children of parents who had willful sinned against God in the wilderness to enter into the Promised Land and did not hold them accountable, responsible or punishable for their parents sin of rebellion. In Deuteronomy 1:39 we read, Moreover your little ones and your children, who you say will be victims, who today have no knowledge of good and evil, they shall go in there; to them I will give it, and they shall possess it.”

Any discussion of the fate of children who die as infants ultimately comes to the issue “the age of accountability.” Although the concept of “the age of accountability” has been around since very early in the history of the Christian Church the term never occurs in Scripture.

But the term itself alludes to the age at which a child becomes responsible for their relationship with God? I need to make this clear, There is no one age at which every person suddenly becomes accountable for knowing that they are a sinner. Only God really knows the time when a child becomes accountable.

In Jonah 4:11 God differentiates between those “who could not discern between their right hand and their left...” Those who could not tell their right hand and their left were the small children and those who were mentally disabled and therefore incapable of making such a judgment.

We all understand that there is a period of time before which children are incapable of understanding the difference between God and evil and especially cannot understand that they are sinners who need to be saved. What then happens to that one who is not yet old enough or though housed in mature bodies, whose minds are impaired in such a way that they cannot grasp their need for salvation?

John MacArthur states it well when he says, “How can we believe that God weeps over the lost and pleads with willful sinners to be reconciled to Him if He catapults millions upon millions of innocent babies into Hell before they even reach a state of moral culpability – before they have the ability to make any moral distinction between good and evil.” [John MacArthur. “Safe In the Arms of God: Truth From Heaven About The Death Of A Child. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003) p. 79]

How then are these children saved.... They are saved the same way you are.... By Grace...but in this case extended to those who cannot express faith.

We have not only the character of the Father but ...

Secondly, The Compassion of Jesus

While on earth, Jesus desired the company of children. In Mark 10:13-16 Jesus says, “Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them: but that disciples rebuked those who brought them. (14) But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, “Let the little children come to Me and do not forbid them; for such is the kingdom of God. (15) Assuredly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.”

According to verse fourteen it was Jesus who took the little children up in his arms and said, “Let the little children come to Me and do not forbid them; for such is the kingdom of God.” Infants who have died are in Heaven. In the arms of our dear Savior they are secure and safe and blessed.

We are sure that little ones go to be with Jesus because we believe that little ones who are not yet old enough to understand sin and the need for a savior go to be with the Lord when they die.

When it come to children and their place in Heaven Matthew 18:14 sums up the feeling of Jesus, "Even so it not the will of the Father who is in Heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

Not only the Compassion of Jesus but ...

Third, The Confidence of David

Most everyone here is familiar with the story of David and Bathsheba. David, then the king of Israel had an affair with a married woman, named Bathsheba. David attempted to hide their relation-ship, even going so far as to have Bathsheba's husband put into a position where he was killed, effectively murdering him. David then took Bathsheba as his own wife. The prophet Nathan appeared to David and told him that his new born son would die. Indeed, he became ill and David fasted and wept, to the extent that his servants were afraid to tell the King that his son had died for fear of what he might do. But when he learned his son had died, he astonished his servants.

According to 2 Samuel 12:20 "So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes: and he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate." David's behavior literally stunned his servants, who asked him why he was behaving as he was? David's reply has comforted countless grieving parents down through the centuries when he said, (12:23) "Now that he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." Because David believed that one day he would be reunited with his son, he could relinquish him into God's care.

Some argue that David is just saying that one day he would join his son in the grave. But that is ridiculous, how could that comfort the heart of this grieving father. No, David believed with every fiber of his being that his son was with the Lord and because he belonged to the Lord they would be reunited and spend all of eternity together. David knew that the little baby was saved. He said, "I will go to him someday." David knew that when death came to him, he would be reunited with his son.

His confidence in this fact is strongly contrasted by how David reacted when a second son, Absalom was killed. When learned his infant son died David stopped mourning and he learned his adult son had died he started mourning! What was the difference? It was not just that David started mourning when he was informed of Absalom's death; it was that he was inconsolable. David mourned with unrelieved grief for Absalom because he believed that he would not see this wicked and rebellious adult son again. He knew that his infant son was in Heaven and he knew that this son had died in his sin without repentance.

J. Vernon McGee says concerning children in heaven. "I believe with all my heart that God will raise the little ones such that the mother's arms who have ached for them will have the opportunity of holding them. The father's hand which never held the little hand will be given the privilege. I believe that little ones will grow up in heaven in the care of their earthly parents if they are saved." [www.backtothebible.org/interact/faq/child.htm]

There may be a very good reason that God did not just straight out tell us that all children who die in infancy go to Heaven. As Randy Alcorn points out, "If children do go to Heaven when they die, why doesn't God tell us that directly? It may be that He anticipates the twisted logic and rationalization it might foster in us. It might take from us the sense of urgency to see our children come to faith in Christ. It might cause us to be less concerned about the sacred God-given task of extending physical and financial help to the underprivileged and getting the gospel to children around the world." [Randy Alcorn Heaven. (Carol Stream, Illinois :Tyndale, 2004) p. 342]

Conclusion

Have you grieved the loss of a child? If so then, I believe there is sufficient reason to take heart. Your child is in Heaven today, awaiting your arrival. The more difficult question is "Will You Be In Heaven With Your Baby? Your child was too young to make a decision, but you are not. The parents who have children awaiting them in Heaven do not automatically go to Heaven when they die. If you see your child again and enjoy a heavenly reunion, you must be born again.