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The King's Own Guarantee

What of Those Who Die in Infancy?

Compiled & Revised from the Writings of J. Sidlow Baxter

Are infants who die saved? It is a poignant and far-reaching question. Despite the decrease of the international infant mortality rate in the last 50 years, even today the world's annual death rate shows that 25% of those who are born on this earth die in infancy. Thus, this subject is an important one.

There are certain characteristics of the Bible which are so recurrent that one might well call them "laws" of written revelation. There is the *law of first mention*, by which we mean that the first mention of any major subject seems invariably the key to all subsequent references to it. There is also the *law of full mention*, by which we mean that somewhere, usually much later, there is a summary or outstanding passage on each leading theme. We think of such passages as 1 Corinthians 15 on resurrection; of John 14-16 on the Holy Spirit as the Comforter; of Isaiah 53 on vicarious atonement. Now there is a classic "full-mention" passage on infant salvation, in the light of which all other references are to be interpreted. It is Matthew 18:1-14, and the teacher who speaks to us is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Savior's Four-Fold Teaching on Infant Salvation

1. The Kingdom of Heaven as it Refers to Children (vv. 3-5)

The disciples came to him saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them. With that little child as His text, He then spoke memorable words which, with final authority, settle this matter of infant salvation. He first speaks of the kingdom of heaven in regard to children.

Verily I say unto you, except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receives me. (Matthew 18:3-5)

The startling feature is that an entrance into the kingdom of heaven requires conversion to childlikeness. There is a wide difference, of course, between being *child-like* and being *child-ish*. We certainly are not meant to be childish in mind, but we are meant to be childlike in humility, simplicity, and trustfulness. This is the reason, no doubt, that the Lord Jesus added later,

"The 'new covenant,' sealed with the blood of Calvary, makes all human infants the inalienable beneficiaries of its provisions. It guarantees their eternal salvation. What we say is well grounded in that fifth chapter of Romans. Read it until it grips you; and you will never again doubt that all who die in infancy are saved."

**J. Sidlow Baxter
(1903-1999)**

“For of such is the kingdom of Heaven”(Matthew 19:14). The implication is that little children already possess that essential passport into the kingdom. If young children possess that first qualification, and the kingdom is said to be “of such”, it is utterly unthinkable that “one such little child” could ever be found in that “outer darkness” where there is “weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

2. A Warning Against Offending Little Children (vv. 6-9)

Secondly, the Lord now warns against offending little children.

But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of such offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh! (vv. 6-7)

Whatever wider application those words about “offenses” have, their reference is to offenses against children. It was our Lord’s allusion to the humility and trustfulness of children which occasioned them. The very solemnity of the warning to adults measures the preciousness of children to God. And what kind of offenses against children did Jesus have in mind? He meant hurting them morally and spiritually, for He says, “Whoso shall offend one of these little one which believe in Me...” Those words cast a lovely light on the conversion of a child. God knows what is in boys and girls, and there are many who, with beautiful simplicity, truly believe on Him. Yes, there are real believers among the young. What their faith lacks in maturity, it makes up for in its guileless simplicity.

Biographer Roy A. Beltz writes in *Mighty in the Scriptures*, a biography of Matthew Henry:

“At the tender age of three, Matthew could read the Bible distinctly and had some knowledge of its meaning... He was instructed in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. He listened to his father expound the Holy Scriptures and the unceasing prayers of his devout parents. His good instruction was backed up by their consistent and holy living. At ten years old his soul was awakened and he sought and found Christ as his personal Savior.”¹

Let us mark well our Lord’s severe warning and learn from it the measureless preciousness of young children to Him—not only those who have been taught about Him and “believe” in Him, but all those others who, through no fault of their own, have not been taught. Of them He says, “Whoso shall receive one such little child in My Name receives Me”; and again, “Forbid them not to come to Me.” Remember again who it is who so speaks. He has the first right to them by creation and redemption, and if He thus treasures them, is not that His guarantee that if they die as children they are saved?

3. A Warning Against Despising of Children (v. 18:10)

“Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in Heaven”(Matthew 18:10). A revealing word indeed! Children have guardian angels! Attempts to lessen the meaning of our Lord’s words have been, as scholarly Dean Alford says, “merely to evade the plain sense” of them. What our Lord said is the more notable because it is not loosely plural and general but significantly singular—“one of these little ones.” There is one of those

“Infants are objects of Divine care, not because they have not been under the curse like others, but because they have been rescued from it. The human race was one mass of perdition, in which infants are included, on account of original sin; and concerning this sin, the whole of humanity has been redeemed.”

**J. Albrecht Bengel
(1687-1752)**

heavenly guardians for each little one. Nor is that all. Those heavenly watchers are angels with special privilege. "In heaven their angels always behold the face of My Father who is in heaven." According to oriental custom, only select favorites were allowed to come often into the monarch's presence. But even more, our Lord means that those angels have direct access to God on behalf of earth's little ones, in a way that other angels do not. They are priority servants of the Crown. Such is the importance which God attaches to children. Meanwhile, it emerges clearly that at the death of each child at least one guardian angel is invisibly present; and as soon as the guileless little one vacates the body, the real child is gently borne away to the best of all nurseries, there to be cherished, nurtured, and tutored in ways infinitely better than any earthly upbringing which could have been provided.

4. The Heavenly Father's Salvation of Children (vv. 11-14)

As our Lord unfolds his teaching on the salvation of infants, He tells a parable. It is a crowning parable.

For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost. How think ye? If a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and go into the mountains, and seek that which is gone astray? An if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoices more of that sheep than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish (Matthew 18:11-14).

This parable need not be restricted to children, yet the captivating fact is, it was to children that the Lord applied it. "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these *little ones* perish." Note that our Lord puts His statement in the negative form. That is, He tells us what the will of God is *not*: "It is not the will of your Father that one of these little ones should *perish*." The use of the negative in such cases is a rhetorical form of emphasis. For instance, Exodus 20:7 says, "The Lord will *not* hold him guiltless," meaning that the Lord will most surely condemn him as guilty. So when Jesus here tells us it is not the will of God that even one little child should perish, He is accentuating the positive. "It is the will of your Father who is in heaven that each of these little ones *should be saved*."

Let us seize eagerly that assurance. It is God's will that children should be saved: so if they die in infancy they are saved. The Good Shepherd came to save them. This parable says so. He died to save them. They are His by purchase. The law cannot condemn them, for they have never broken it: and the Cross of Jesus more than answers for all their hereditary disqualifications. The Father's will is now expressed through God the Son—through what He taught and what He wrought. Beyond a doubt, then, those who die as children are *saved*.

5. Our Savior's Object Lesson (Matthew 19:14)

What eloquence there often was in the gestures by which our Lord complemented His teaching or miracles! He not only healed the leper (Mark 1:21); He touched him. On the evening after His resurrection He not only said to His disciples, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit"; He symbolically breathed on them (John 20:22). Now when He spoke His wonderful words about children, in Matthew chapter 18, He also did something which put a lovely

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(1903-1999)



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embroidery on what He said. He "called a little child" (Matthew 18:2). Then He "set him in the midst" (so it was a little boy). Can you not hear it and see it? But there is more. The gospel of Mark mentions something that Matthew's gospel omits. Mark says that Jesus "set him in the midst...and when he had *taken Him in His arms* he said to them..." (Mark 10:16). Jesus preached a sermon with the little boy actually in his arms! Those arms were the arms of God. Let those arms speak to us as well as those lips. They tell us that when our little ones pass from this earthly scene, we may sing with consoling certainty the word of the old hymn:

*Safe in the arms of Jesus
Safe on His gentle breast
There, by His love overshadowed
Sweetly my soul shall rest.—Frances J. Crosby*

Conclusion

Can we think of children who die as lost? Our reply is a capital NO. The Bible nowhere says or implies that young children who die are lost. We have scanned the pages of both the Old Testament and the New, but nowhere have we found any such doctrine as that of infant damnation, nor have we been able to find even a trace of it. If little ones are taken from us, like unopened flowers plucked from the garden by an invisible hand, let us try to discern a gracious purpose even through our tears. Each one taken from us is meant to be a tender link with heaven, to wean our hearts from too much of a love of earthly things. "Where your treasure is," says Jesus, "there will your heart be also."

Endnotes

1. Roy A. Beltz, *Matthew Henry, Mighty In The Scriptures*, (Des Moines, IA:Boone Publishing, 1947), p. 11-13

Further Reading

Robert P. Lightner, *Heaven For Those Who Can't Believe*, (Regular Baptist Press: Schaumburg, IL, 1977)