

Text

Various

To read 2 Sam:1-23 & Rom 5:12-21

Main Point

Infant Salvation

Introduction (300)

Hook

Personal loss of a child

Today we continue in our study in the 1689 confession.

Our study brings us to the weighty question of infant salvation.

Do babies who die go to heaven?

Now this is something that is close to each of our hearts. I know that some of you here have experienced the loss of a child personally.

Be it a miscarriage or a stillbirth,

Be it a tragic accident or a disease that took the life of your precious little one,

If it has not happened to you personally, you know someone who has lost a child. These tragic events are a reality in all of our lives.

Parents

And also, every one of us who is a parent is faced with the possibility of our child dying. We live in a world

where accidents happen in seconds. We are all too aware that the life of our little ones is so frail.

This is no theoretical matter.

Is my baby, who died, in heaven? If my child was to die, would he go to heaven? These are valid questions. Valid questions that merit an answer.

Shere number

We are also confronted by this question when we think of the sheer number of infants who die. In New Zealand, we have many medical advances which have reduced infant mortality, but that is not the case in most of the world or most of history. Having a number of your own children die before reaching maturity was the norm for most of history.

Added to that is the tragedy of abortion. The sheer scale of infant death caused by abortion is staggering. Where do babies who are murdered in the womb go? Do they go to heaven or to hell?

Whether we consider the magnitude of infants who die or the personal grief of losing a child, the question demands an answer: What happens to babies who die?

From the Confession

This question has been pondered throughout the centuries. By theologians, pastors, and fathers mothers, brothers and sisters. We all want to know.

When the authors of the confession considered that question this is how they summarised their answer: (ch10 paragraph 3)

3. Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit; who worketh when,

and where, and how he pleases; so also are all elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word. (John 3:3, 5, 6; John 3:8)

Infants and mentally disabled

Now you would have notice that this statement includes two groups of people. There are the infants, and there are *“those incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word”*. This second group is referring to those with mental disabilities. Those who’s minds have not developed. Those who have the mind of a child in the body of an adult.

The same conclusion is reached for these people too. They go to heaven when they die. They too are saved by Christ through the Spirit. Everything we say about infants is true of those who have mental disabilities when it comes to salvation.

Elect?

Also did you notice the statement started with “Elect infants... are saved”.

Now Charles Spurgeon is famous for removing the word Elect from the confession to affirm that “all infants are saved”

Having the word elect there seems to indicate that some infants are not elect, but that is not what this statement is saying.

It is true that all elect infants who die are saved. But we find that the bible teaches that all infants who die are saved and are therefore elect.

There is no category of infants who die that are not elect. We understand why Spurgeon removed it to give

clarity, but there is nothing false about having it there. If a child dies in infancy it proves they are elect.

So there is the summary answer from the 1689: What happens to babies and mentally disabled people when they die?

3. Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit; who worketh when, and where, and how he pleases; so also are all elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word. (John 3:3, 5, 6; John 3:8)

Not sentimental

Now these men were not being sentimental, giving an answer they knew the parents wanted to hear. This statement was based on careful study of the Word of God.

This evening, I want us to look a few passages together to bring scriptural foundation to this statement.

Through careful study of what **has** been revealed in the Word of God, we can come to the conclusion that all infants dying in infancy, as well as those with mental disabilities, go to heaven when they die.

Outline

To navigate this topic, we are going to break our time together into two parts.

1. The David Story (The real-life story of David losing his child)
2. The Divine Statements (The theology that forms the basis to say that all infants go to heaven when they die)

Part 1 – The David Story

So let us begin with our first part: The David Story. Please turn with me to 2 Sam 12.

Context

Now I am sure you are well familiar with the story. David commits adultery with Bathsheba, and they conceive a child.

Then David tries to hide his sin by committing more sin, but eventually, like all sin, it is brought to the light.

David is rebuked by the prophet Nathan, and David by God's grace is repentant. We read of his repentance in Ps 32 and 51.

And part of God dealing with this gross sin that David has committed is that the child conceived with Bathsheba will die. Nathan tells that to David in verse 14.

Sorrow while still alive

And sure enough, the child became sick.

And David is distraught. He prays to God on behalf of the child. He is in deeply saddened and the sorrow is heavy on his heart. He lays himself on the ground and does not want to move. He is so distraught that he does not eat or drink, even when those he trusts encourage him to get up and eat some food, he can't do it.

David is deeply troubled by the impending death of his child.

His fasting and praying in this manner goes on for seven days as the baby becomes weaker and weaker and then finally dies.

In verse 18 we read:

¹⁸ On the seventh day 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 yet alive, we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us. How then can we say to him the child is dead? He may do himself some harm."

David's servants had never seen David so distraught. He was in such a state while the child lived, when David hears the child is dead, he might do himself some harm, he might take his own life in the depths of his sorrow.

Restored when child dies

But that is not how David responds.

David sees the servants whispering and he comes to the conclusion himself that his child is dead.

And then what does David do? Look at verse 20.

²⁰ Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. He then went to his own house. And when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate.

He is no longer distraught. He is no longer in the pits of sorrow. He gets himself up, washes up, combs his hair, and puts on a new change of clothes and goes to the house of the Lord to worship. His appetite is back and eats and drinks.

This is all backwards. While the child was alive David was in mourning, now that the child is dead David is no longer in mourning. This makes no sense, and his servants point that out to him. But then David explains. Verse 22

²² He said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, 'Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?'"

The loss of a child is deeply painful, and while he was alive there was hope he may be made well. In that hope David fasted and prayed fervently for the life of that child.

Parting is temporary

But now that the child is dead, things are different. In verse 23 he says

*²³ But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? **I shall go to him**, but he will not return to me."*

Here, David makes a stunning statement. "I shall go to him".

That child is somewhere. The soul of that child lives on, and one day David would be reunited with his child. With his precious little one.

He knew the parting was only temporary. This was not the final goodbye, but a 'see you later.' His child had simply gone ahead of him, and when David died, David would go to him. There was a real hope of reunion.

David knew where he was going

And we have to remember that David knew where he was going when he died.

- He knew he would go to heaven.
- He knew God would not abandon his soul to Sheol;
- he knew he would dwell in the house of the lord forever.

Remember Psalm 16 verse 9

Ps 16:9-11

*⁹ Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being^[e] rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.*

*¹⁰ For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.^[f]*

*¹¹ You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

And Ps 23:6

*⁶ Surely^[d] goodness and mercy^[e] shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell^[f] in the house of the Lord
forever.^[g]*

So when David says “*I shall go to him*” he clearly believes that when he died and goes to heaven he would see his child there.

- That his child was already in the presence of the Lord with fullness of joy.
- That his child was already dwelling in the house of the Lord.
- That eternity in goodness had already begun for his child.

Application – Hope to see your little ones again

Friends, like David you can have hope that you will see your little one again when you die. You can have hope that you will be reunited in heaven.

David had hope based on his knowledge of the grace and goodness of God.

But our hope is even stronger because we have seen the goodness, the grace and the Love of God displayed on the Cross.

Like David you too can turn from mourning because of the hope we find in the grace and goodness of God

Application – Hope only if you are going to heaven when you die.

But make careful note of this:

David had that hope only because **he knew** where he was going when he died. He knew he would go to heaven when he died because he trusted in the promise of God.

Are you sure you will go to heaven when you die?

Your sin condemns you to Hell. So only if you trust that Jesus has paid for your sins will you go to heaven.

If you **do not** trust in Jesus Christ as your saviour, you **will not** see your little ones who died ever again.

They will be in heaven, but you will be in hell.

Don't let that be true of you!

Repent. Turn to Christ and cling to him and he promises to save you.

And then you can know that you will be reunited with that precious child you lost.

Link

David had that hope to see his child again.

You can have that hope too if you trust that Jesus is your saviour.

But what is that hope based on?

How can David and the authors of the confession say that? What basis do they have?

This brings us to our second section:

Part 2 – The Divine Statements

Overview

For this section, I want us to look at some key truths taught in scripture which gives us the basis for our hope that all infants go to heaven when they die.

We can't delve in each of these in any depth, but I want to outline these five things:

1. The reality of Original sin/ Total Depravity.
2. That people are condemned for their own sins.
3. That Infants don't have the ability to make moral decisions.
4. Infants, like adults, are saved based on the righteousness of Christ.
5. Salvation is by God's grace alone.

We will take these five things one at a time.

Original Sin

The biggest truth that can stand in people's minds when it comes to infant salvation is the doctrine of original sin. The doctrine of total depravity. The Bible is incredibly clear on this.

All humans are guilty before God because of Adam's sin.

Rom 5:18 is incredibly clear:

¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass^[f] led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness^[g] leads to justification and life for all men.

As a church that holds to the doctrines of Grace, this is nothing new, and we cannot deny this whether we like the doctrine or not. God's word is very clear here.

So, if Babies are guilty the moment they are conceived, is the logical conclusion that all babies who die go to Hell?

If all we had was Rom 5:18, and Ephesians 2:3 and psalm 51:5 we may be forced to come to that conclusion.

But that is not all we have. God has revealed more to us. Which brings us to the next piece of the puzzle.

Condemned for their own sin

God condemns humans to hell for their own sins. This is an important distinction. Yes they are guilty because of Adam's sin, but they are judged, condemned and sentenced to Hell because of their own sin.

Turn with me if you would to 2 Cor 5:10

*¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what **he has done in the body**, whether good or evil.*

In Revelation 20:11-12 we see the same thing. People are judged according to their deeds.

Children not able to make moral choices

Ok so there we have two pieces of the puzzle. Yes all are guilty at conception, but we also see people are judged based on **their** evil actions.

The next question is: "are infants, unborn babies, and those with mental disabilities able to exercise wilful rebellion against God?"

- Does the unborn child have a ledger of sins he has committed?
- Does an infant have the ability to wilfully sin?
- Does a person with a mental disability have the ability to know right from wrong?

The Bible seems to indicate that an infant is **not** able to know right from wrong.

Deut 1:39 is a classic example.

*³⁹ And as for **your little ones**, who you said would become a prey, and your children, who today have no knowledge of good or evil, they shall go in there. And to them I will give it, and they shall possess it.*

The little ones are not condemned to die in the desert.

And also Jonah 4:11, God talks of the 120,000 persons (infants) who do not know their right hand from their left, that is they do not know the difference between good and evil.

In both these passages, there seems to be a distinction. There are some who have not yet reached a condition of accountability.

Romans 1 (v18-32) confirms this in a backhanded sort of way. Why are all people rightly condemned before God? Because they know things of God and they choose to ignore that knowledge.

Babies and those with mental disabilities don't have access to that knowledge, so how can God condemn them?

Saved In Christ

So there is the third piece of the puzzle. Infants do not have "works done in the body" They do not have a record of their own sin.

But we still have the problem of original sin. All are guilty because of Adam's sin.

So if infants are saved (and they are) it is not because they are innocent. That is incredibly important to remember.

Infants just like everyone else are saved by the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Infants and the mentally disabled also need a mediator to stand innocent before the throne of God.

And so Rom 5:18 becomes the key verse here too.

*¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass^[f] led to condemnation for all men, **so one act of righteousness^[g]** leads to justification and life for all men.*

And that is exactly what the confession spells out:

Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit;

Saved by Grace

Which brings us to the last piece of the puzzle. OK they are saved by the righteousness of Christ but how do they receive it?

And the answer is they receive it just like everyone else.

By grace. By grace alone. Even for adults, the faith and repentance we are commanded to exercise is a gift of God. We can only accept the gift of Salvation by God's grace.

Salvation is by grace alone.

As adults, we struggle to understand that salvation is by grace alone. We constantly think we can bring something to the table or that we contribute in some way.

When we understand that our salvation is by Grace alone, that we cannot merit it and that we cannot pay it back, then it becomes easy to see that infants would be saved too.

Because it is all by God's grace.

Matthew 18 Illustration

In fact, Jesus uses children as an analogy to help us understand that salvation is by Grace alone.

Please turn with me to Matthew 18.

As usual the disciples are arguing about who is the greatest. Which one merits the greatest honour. And Jesus replies this way:

² And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them ³ and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Of course, Jesus is using the analogy of a child to illustrate how we are saved by Grace alone. Children are fully dependent on their parents, bring nothing to the table, they can't pay back their parents, all they can do is humbly accept the gifts their parents give them. They bring nothing at all.

But the analogy can be seen as not merely relating to earthly parents, but pointing to how infants enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus seems to be leaning in on the truth that infants are saved by Grace alone to help us understand how we, too, are saved by grace alone.

He uses the truth that infants are saved by grace alone to help us understand that we are saved by grace alone too!

Salvation is all by God's grace.

Link/summary

So there you have a quick overview of the big pieces of the puzzle that lead us to the conclusion that infants who die go to heaven:

1. We affirm Original sin, so infants need a saviour
2. We also see that People are condemned for their own sins.
3. We see that Infants don't have the ability to make moral decisions.
4. We see that Infants, like adults, are saved based on the righteousness of Christ.

5. And finally Salvation is by God's grace alone, for the adult or the child

It is true that there are no verse that explicitly states that infants who die go to heaven, but from what God has revealed to us, we do have the hope that infants go to heaven when they die.

Conclusion

So when you seek to comfort the parent who is mourning after the loss of their child,
or if by a dark providence, you experience the loss of your own child,
you can have hope that your child is in the presence of God.

To hold that hope does not deny the clear teaching of scripture.

To hold that hope is not driven by sentiment.

To hold that hope is to rest in what he has revealed about himself and his work to us.

To hold that hope is to rest in the goodness, mercy and grace of God.

And friends, only there can we find true peace.

Only when we trust in God's grace can we say, with David:

*²³ But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? **I shall go to him**, but he will not return to me.” (2 Sam 12:23)*

Let us pray