

Infant Salvation: Biblical Basis or Sentimental Supposition?



INFANT SALVATION: *Biblical Basis or Sentimental Supposition?*



1A. THE IMPORTANCE OF INFANT SALVATION:

1b. Its importance for the world:

2b. Its importance for the weeping:

Rom. 12:15 "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep."

3b. Its importance for our witness:

I Pet. 3:15 "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:"

2A. THE IMPLICATIONS OF INFANT SALVATION:

1b. Infant similarities with adults:

1c. All infants have a sin nature:

Ps. 51:5 "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."

Rom 5:12 "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

2c. All infants need grace:

Eph. 2:8 "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:"

3c. All infants need God's election:

John 6:44 "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day."

4c. All infants need redemption:

John 3:3 "Jesus answered and said unto him, verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."



2A. THE IMPLICATIONS FOR INFANT SALVATION:

2b. Infant differences from adults:

1c. Infants have not knowingly sinned:

2c. Infants have not rejected Christ:

3c. Infants do not need to believe:

3A. THE INFERENCES FROM SCRIPTURE:

1b. The comprehensiveness of the atonement:

Christ died for all, not simply for the elect:

2 Pet. 2:1 "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction."

Is. 53:6 "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

2b. The character of God:

I Jn 4:8 "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."

Jonah 4:11 "And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"

Ps. 36:6

3b. The comments of the Savior:

Mt. 19:13-14 "Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Mt. 18:3-5 (NASB) "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one such child in My name receives me (italics added)."

3A. THE INFERENCES FROM SCRIPTURE:

3b. The comments of the Savior:

Mt. 18:10 (NASB) "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven (italics added)."

Mt. 18:14 (NASB) "Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

John Sproule has the following observations on these references from Matthew 18:

1. Little children (not just those in His immediate presence in the Matthean account) are very precious to our Lord.
2. Child-like trust, characteristic of little children, identifies the quality of individual who shall be great in the kingdom of heaven.
3. It is not God's will that any little child should perish. It would be difficult to believe that Christ had in mind only those few children who were in His immediate presence when He made the statement recorded in Matt. 18:14.
4. Little children are said to have their angels in heaven (Matt. 18:10). They are represented before God. This also supports the belief that infants or children who die enter into eternal life with God. (p. 5)

4b. The case of David:

II Sam. 18:33

When David's son, Absalom, died he had no hope of ever seeing him again. When his infant son of Bethsheba died as a punishment for David's offense, David was comforted and by his comfort and conduct he evidenced his firm conviction that he would see his child again.

II Sam. 12:23

We agree with Sproule:

In conclusion, II Samuel 12:22, 23 is strong implicit evidence that David believed that his infant son was eternally secure with God. Further, if such was true of that particular infant then why is it not also true for all such infants? (p. 4)

II. SAMUEL 18

32 And the king said unto Cū-shī, *Is the young man Ab'sā-lqm safe?* And Cū-shī answered, "The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do *thee* hurt, be as *that* young man *is*."

33 ¶ And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, "O my son Ab'sā-lqm, my son, my son Ab'sā-lqm! would God I had died for thee, O Ab'sā-lqm, my son, my son!"

II. SAMUEL 12

22 And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: "for I said, Who can tell *whether* GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?"

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

3A. THE INFERENCES FROM SCRIPTURE:

5b. The conclusion from Scripture:

Since the Bible is silent on the fate of infants, we need not worry about their destiny.

Strong cites Hovey (p. 62) who very fittingly comments on the silence of the Scriptures concerning the fate of the infants:

"Though the sacred writers say nothing in respect to the future condition of those who die in infancy, one can scarcely err in deriving from this silence a favorable conclusion. That no prophet or apostle, that no devout father or mother, should have expressed any solicitude as to those who die before they are able to discern good from evil is surprising, unless such solicitude was prevented by the Spirit of God. There are no instances of prayer for children taken away in infancy. The Savior nowhere teaches that they are in danger of being lost. We therefore heartily and confidently believe that they are redeemed by the blood of Christ and sanctified by his Spirit, so that when they enter the unseen world they will be found with the saints."

"I closely held within my arms
A jewel rare;
Never had one so rich and pure
Engaged my care;
'Twas my own, my precious jewel,
God gave it me;
'Twas mine, who else could care for it,
So tenderly?

"But the Master came one day
My gem to take;
I cannot let it go! I cried,
My heart would break:
Nay, but the Master comes for it,
To bear above
To deck His royal diadem,
He comes in love.

"But Master, it is my treasure,
My jewel rare,
I'll safely guard and keep it pure,
And very fair;
If thou keep'st my gem, He said,
It may be lost;
The threshold of My home, no thief
Has ever crossed.

"And where the heart's rich treasure is,
The heart will be;
Thy jewel will be safe above,
Gone before thee.
The Master said these words and gazed
With pitying look,
While in the early hush of morn,
My gem He took.

"Close to my heart that morn I held,
Tears falling fast,
An empty casket—the bright gem
Was safe at last.
Yes, Master, thou may'st keep my own,
For it is Thine;
Safe in the house not made with hands,
'Tis Thine and mine."

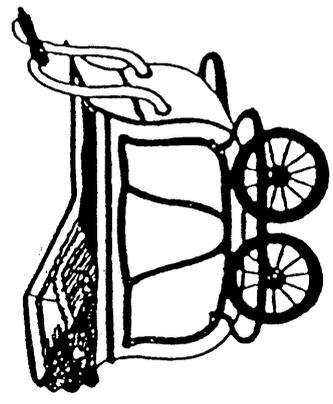
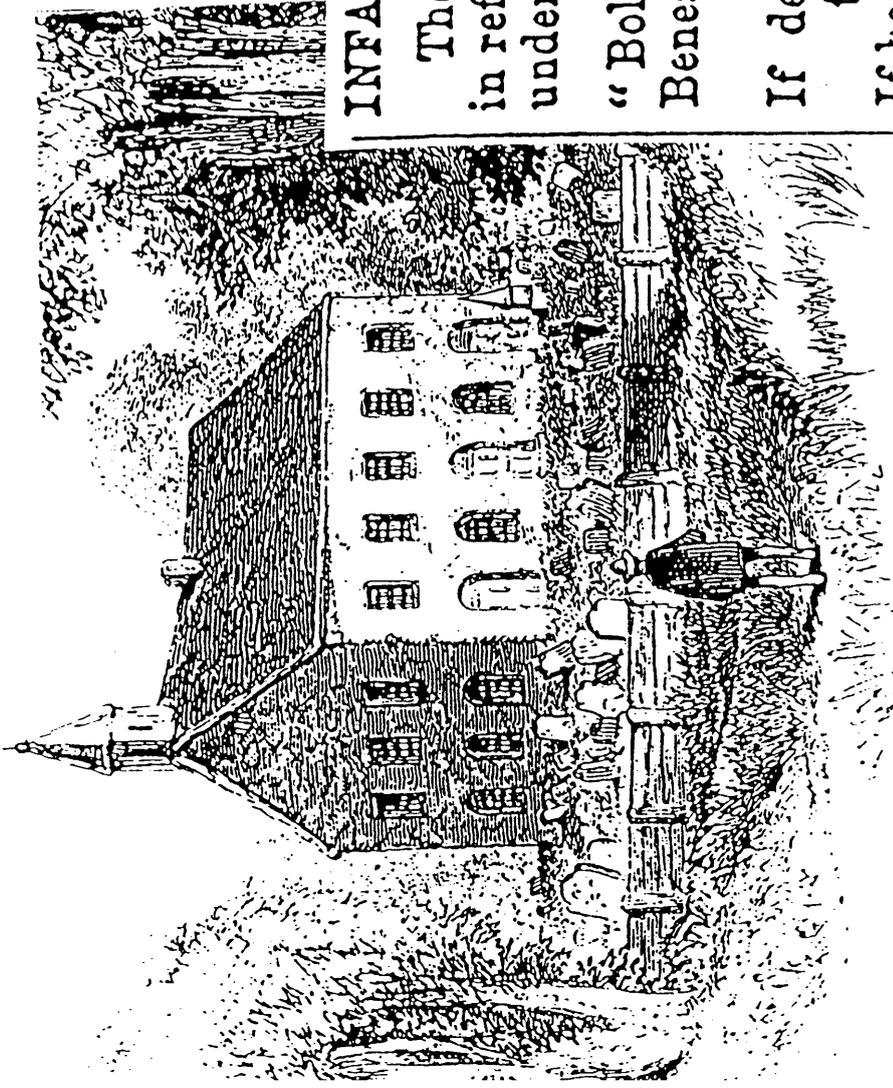


INFANT SALVATION.

The following epitaph is very striking in reference to this subject; it is found, I understand, in Cambridge churchyard—

"Bold infidelity, turn pale and die!
Beneath this stone four infants' ashes lie:
Say, are they lost or saved?
If death's by sin, they sinned, because
they're here;
If heaven's by works, in heaven they can't
appear:
Reason, ah! how depraved!
Revere the sacred page; the knot's untied:
They died, for Adam sinned; they live, for
Jesus died!"

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

INFANT SALVATION.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 29TH, 1861, BY THE

REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well.”—2 Kings iv. 26.

THE subject of this morning's discourse will be “Infant Salvation.” It may not possibly be interesting to all present, but I do not remember to have preached upon this subject to this congregation, and I am anxious moreover that the printed series should contain sermons upon the whole range of theology. I think there is no one point which ought to be left out in our ministry, even though it may only yield comfort to a class. Perhaps the larger proportion of this audience have at some time or other had to shed the briny tear over the child's little coffin;—it may be that through this subject consolation may be afforded to them. This good Shunammite was asked by Gehazi, whether it was well with herself. She was mourning over a lost child, and yet she said, “It is well;” she felt that the trial would surely be blessed. “Is it well with thy husband?” He was old and stricken in years, and was ripening for death, yet she said, “Yes, it is well.” Then came the question about her child, it was dead at home, and the enquiry would renew her griefs, “Is it well with the child?” Yet she said, “It is well,” perhaps so answering because she had a faith that soon it should be restored to her, and that its temporary absence was well; or I think rather because she was persuaded that whatever might have become of its spirit, it was safe in the keeping of God, happy beneath the shadow of his wings. Therefore, not fearing that it was lost, having no suspicion whatever that it was cast away from the place of bliss—for that suspicion would have quite prevented her giving such answer—she said “Yes, the child is dead, but ‘it is well.’”

Now, let every mother and father here present know assuredly that it is well with the child, if God hath taken it away from you in its infant days. You never heard its declaration of faith—it was not capable of such a thing—it was not baptized into the Lord Jesus Christ, not buried with him in baptism; it was not capable of giving that “answer of a good conscience towards God;” nevertheless, you may rest assured that it is well with the child, well in a higher and a better sense than it is well with yourselves; well without limitation, well without exception, well infinitely, “well” eternally. Perhaps you will say, “What reasons have we for believing that it is well with the child?” Before I enter upon that I would make one observation. It has been wickedly, lyingly, and slanderously said of Calvinists, that we believe that some little children perish. Those who make the accusation know that their charge is false. I cannot even dare to hope, though I would wish to do so, that they ignorantly misrepresent us. They wickedly repeat what has been denied a thousand times, what they know is not true. In Calvin's advice to Knox, he interprets the second commandment,

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"showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me," as referring to generations, and hence he seems to teach that infants who have had pious ancestors, no matter how remotely, dying as infants are saved. This would certainly take in the whole race. As for modern Calvinists, I know of no exception, but we all hope and believe that all persons dying in infancy are elect. Dr. Gill, who has been looked upon in late times as being a very standard of Calvinism, not to say of ultra-Calvinism, himself never hints for a moment the supposition that any infant has perished, but affirms of it that it is a dark and mysterious subject, but that it is his belief, and he thinks he has Scripture to warrant it, that they who have fallen asleep in infancy have not perished, but have been numbered with the chosen of God, and so have entered into eternal rest. We have never taught the contrary, and when the charge is brought, I repudiate it and say, "You may have said so, we never did, and you know we never did. If you dare to repeat the slander again, let the lie stand in scarlet on your very cheek if you be capable of a blush." We have never dreamed of such a thing. With very few and rare exceptions, so rare that I never heard of them except from the lips of slanderers, we have never imagined that infants dying as infants have perished, but we have believed that they enter into the paradise of God.

First, then, this morning, I shall endeavour to explain *the way in which we believe infants are saved*; secondly, give *reasons for so believing*; and then, thirdly, seek to bring out a *practical use of the subject*.

I. First of all, THE WAY IN WHICH WE BELIEVE INFANTS TO BE SAVED.

Some ground the idea of the eternal blessedness of the infant upon its *innocence*. We do no such thing; we believe that the infant fell in the first Adam, "for in Adam all died." All Adam's posterity, whether infant or adult, were represented by him—he stood for them all, and when he fell, he fell for them all. There was no exception made at all in the covenant of works made with Adam as to infants dying; and inasmuch as they were included in Adam, though they have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, they have original guilt. They are "born in sin and shapen in iniquity; in sin do their mothers conceive them;" so saith David of himself, and (by inference) of the whole human race. If they be saved, we believe it is not because of any natural innocence. They enter heaven by the very same way that we do; they are received in the name of Christ. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid," and I do not think nor dream that there is a different foundation for the infant than that which is laid for the adult. And equally is it far from our minds to believe that infants go to heaven through *baptism*—not to say, in the first place, that we believe infant sprinkling to be a human and carnal invention, an addition to the Word of God, and therefore wicked and injurious. When we reflect that it is rendered into something worse than superstition by being accompanied with falsehood, when children are taught that in their baptism they are made the children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, which is as base a lie as ever was forged in hell, or uttered beneath the copes of heaven; our spirit sinks at the fearful errors which have crept into the Church, through the one little door of infant sprinkling. No; children are not saved because they are baptized, for if so, the Puseyite is quite right in refusing to bury our little children if they die unbaptized. Yes, the barbarian is quite right in driving the parent, as he does to this day, from the churchyard of his own national Church, and telling him that his child may rot above-ground, and that it shall not be buried except it be at the dead of night, because the superstitious drops have never fallen on its brow. He is right enough if that baptism made the child a Christian, and if that child could not be saved without it. But a thing so revolting to feeling, is at once to be eschewed by Christian men. The child is saved, if snatched away by death as we are, on another ground than that of rites and ceremonies, and the will of man.

On what ground, then, do we believe the child to be saved? We believe it to be as lost as the rest of mankind, and as truly condemned by the sentence which said, "In

the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." It is saved because it is *elect*. In the compass of election, in the Lamb's Book of Life, we believe there shall be found written millions of souls who are only shown on earth, and then stretch their wings for heaven. They are saved, too, because they were *redeemed* by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. He who shed his blood for all his people, bought them with the same price with which he redeemed their parents, and therefore are they saved because Christ was sponsor for them, and suffered in their room and stead. They are saved, again, not without *regeneration*, for, "except a man"—the text does not mean an adult man, but a person, a being of the human race—"except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." No doubt, in some mysterious manner the Spirit of God regenerates the infant soul, and it enters into glory made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. That this is possible is proved from Scripture instances. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb. We read of Jeremiah also, that the same had occurred to him; and of Samuel we find that while yet a babe the Lord called him. We believe, therefore, that even before the intellect can work, God, who worketh not by the will of man, nor by blood, but by the mysterious agency of his Holy Spirit, creates the infant soul a new creature in Christ Jesus, and then it enters into the "rest which remaineth for the people of God." By election, by redemption, by regeneration, the child enters into glory, by the selfsame door by which every believer in Christ Jesus hopes to enter, and in no other way. If we could not suppose that children could be saved in the same way as adults, if it would be necessary to suppose that God's justice must be infringed, or that his plan of salvation must be altered to suit their cases, then we should be in doubt; but we can see that with the same appliances, by the same plan, on precisely the same grounds, and through the same agencies, the infant soul can behold the Saviour's face in glory everlasting, and therefore we are at ease upon the matter.

II. This brings me now to note THE REASONS WHY WE THUS THINK INFANTS ARE SAVED.

First, we ground our conviction very much upon the *goodness of the nature of God*. We say that the opposite doctrine that some infants perish and are lost, is altogether repugnant to the idea which we have of Him whose name is love. If we had a God whose name was Moloch, if God were an arbitrary tyrant, without benevolence or grace, we could suppose some infants being cast into hell; but our God, who heareth the young ravens when they cry, certainly will find no delight in the shrieks and cries of infants cast away from his presence. We read of him that he is so tender, that he careth for oxen, that he would not have the mouth of the ox muzzled, that treadeth out the corn. Nay, he careth for the bird upon the nest, and would not have the mother bird killed while sitting upon its nest with its little ones. He made ordinances and commands even for irrational creatures. He finds food for the most loathsome animal, nor does he neglect the worm any more than the angel, and shall we believe with such universal goodness as this, that he would cast away the infant soul? I say it would be clean contrary to all that we have ever read or ever believed of Him, that our faith would stagger before a revelation which should display a fact so singularly exceptional to the tenor of his other deeds. We have learned humbly to submit our judgments to his will, and we dare not criticise or accuse the Lord of All; we believe him to be just, let him do as he may, and therefore, whatever he might reveal we would accept; but he never has, and I think he never will require of us so desperate a stretch of faith as to see goodness in the eternal misery of an infant cast into hell. You remember when Jonah—petulant, quick-tempered Jonah—would have Nineveh perish, God gave it as the reason why Nineveh should not be destroyed, that there were in it more than six score thousand infants,—persons, he said, who knew not their right hand from their left. If he spared Nineveh that their mortal life might be spared, think you that their immortal souls shall be needlessly cast away? I only put it to your own

reason. It is not a case where we need much argument. Would *your* God cast away an infant? If yours could, I am happy to say he is not the God that I adore.

Again, we think it would be inconsistent utterly with *the known character of our Lord Jesus Christ*. When his disciples put away the little children whom their anxious mothers brought to him, Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forb. them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven," by which he taught, as John Newton very properly says, that such as these made up a very great part of the kingdom of heaven. And when we consider that upon the best statistics it is calculated that more than one third of the human race die in infancy, and probably if we take into calculation those districts where infanticide prevails, as in heathen countries, such as China and the like, perhaps one half of the population of the world die before they reach adult years,—the saying of the Saviour derives great force indeed, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." If some remind me that the kingdom of heaven means the dispensation of grace on earth, I answer, yes, it does, and it means the same dispensation in heaven too; for while part of the kingdom of heaven is on earth in the Church, since the Church is always one, that other part of the Church which is above is also the kingdom of heaven. We know this text is constantly used as a proof of baptism, but in the first place, Christ did not baptize them, for "Jesus Christ baptized not;" in the second place, his disciples did not baptize them, for they withstood their coming, and would have driven them away. Then if Jesus did not, and his disciples did not, who did? It has no more to do with baptism than with circumcision. There is not the slightest allusion to baptism in the text, or in the context; and I can prove the circumcision of infants from it with quite as fair logic as others attempt to prove infant baptism. However, it does prove this, that infants compose a great part of the family of Christ, and that Jesus Christ is known to have had a love and amiableness towards the little ones. When they shouted in the temple, "Hosanna!" did he rebuke them? No; but rejoiced in their boyish shouts. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hath God ordained strength," and does not that text seem to say that in heaven there shall be "perfect praise" rendered to God by multitudes of cherubs who were here on earth—your little ones fondled in your bosom—and then suddenly snatched away to heaven. I could not believe it of Jesus, that he would say to little children, "Depart, ye accursed, into everlasting fire in hell!" I cannot conceive it possible of him as the loving and tender one, that when he shall sit to judge all nations, he should put the little ones on the left hand, and should banish them for ever from his presence. Could he address them, and say to them, "I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not?" How *could* they do it? And if the main reason of damnation lie in sins of omission like these, which it was not possible for them to commit, for want of power to perform the duty, how, then, shall he condemn and cast them away?

Furthermore, we think that *the ways of grace*, if we consider them, render it highly improbable, not to say impossible, that an infant soul should be destroyed. What saith Scripture? "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Such a thing as that could not be said of an infant cast away. We know that God is so abundantly gracious that such expressions as the "unsearchable riches of Christ," "God who is rich in mercy," "A God full of compassion," "The exceeding riches of his grace," and the like, are truly applicable without exaggeration or hyperbole. We know that he is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works, and that in grace he is able to do "exceeding abundantly above what we can ask or even think." The grace of God has sought out in the world the greatest sinners. It has not passed by the vilest of the vile. He who called himself the chief of sinners was a partaker of the love of Christ. All manner of sin and of blasphemy have been forgiven unto man. He has been able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Christ, and does it seem consistent with such grace as this that it should pass by the myriads upon myriads of little ones, who wear the image of the earthy Adam, and never stamp upon them the image of the heavenly? I cannot conceive such a thing. He that has tasted, and felt, and handled the grace of God, will, I think, shrink instinctively from any other doctrine than this, that infants dying such, are most assuredly saved.

Once again, one of the strongest inferential arguments is to be found in the fact that Scripture positively states that *the number of saved souls at the last will be very great*. In the Revelation we read of a number that no man can number. The Psalmist speaks of them as numerous as dew drops from the womb of the morning. Many passages give to Abraham, as the father of the faithful, a seed as many as the stars of heaven, or as the sand on the sea shore. Christ is to see of the travail of his soul

and be satisfied ; surely it is not a little that will satisfy him. The virtue of the precious redemption involves a great host who were redeemed. All Scripture seems to teach that heaven will not be a narrow world, that its population will not be like a handful gleaned out of a vintage, but that Christ shall be glorified by ten thousand times ten thousand, whom he hath redeemed with his blood. Now where are they to come from ? How small a part of the map could be called Christian ! Look at it. Out of that part which could be called Christian, how small a portion of them would bear the name of believer ! How few could be said to have even a nominal attachment to the Church of Christ ! Out of this, how many are hypocrites, and know not the truth ! I do not see it possible, unless indeed the millennium age should soon come, and then far exceed a thousand years ; I do not see how it is possible that so vast a number should enter heaven, unless it be on the supposition that infant souls constitute the great majority. It is a sweet belief to my own mind that there will be more saved than lost, for in all things Christ is to have the pre-eminence, and why not in this ? It was the thought of a great divine that perhaps at the last the number of the lost would not bear a greater proportion to the number of the saved, than do the number of criminals in gaols to those who are abroad in a properly-conducted state. I hope it may be found to be so. At any rate, it is not my business to be asking, " Lord, are there few that shall be saved ? " The gate is strait, but the Lord knows how to bring thousands through it without making it any wider, and we ought not to seek to shut any out by seeking to make it narrower. Oh ! I do know that Christ will have the victory, and that as he is followed by streaming hosts, the black prince of hell will never be able to count so many followers in his dreary train as Christ in his resplendent triumph. And if so, we *must* have the children saved ; yea, brethren, if not so, we *must have them*, because we feel anyhow they must be numbered with the blessed, and dwell with Christ hereafter.

Now for one or two *incidental matters which occur in Scripture*, which seem to throw a little light also on the subject. You have not forgotten the case of David. His child by Bathsheba was to die as a punishment for the father's offence. David prayed, and fasted, and vexed his soul ; at last they tell him the child is dead. He fasted no more, but he said, " I shall go to him, he shall not return to me." Now, where did David expect to go to ? Why, to heaven surely. Then his child must have been there, for he said, " I shall go to him." I do not hear him say the same of Absalom. He did not stand over his corpse, and say, " I shall go to him ; " he had no hope for that rebellious son. Over this child it was not—" O my son ! would to God I had died for thee ! " No, he could let this babe go with perfect confidence, for he said, " I shall go to him." " I know," he might have said, " that He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, and when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil, for he is with me ; I shall go to my child, and in heaven we shall be re-united with each other." You remember, too, those instances which I have already quoted, where children are said to have been sanctified from the womb. It casts this light upon the subject, it shows it not to be impossible that a child should be a partaker of grace while yet a babe. Then you have the passage, " Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings he hath perfected praise." The coming out of Egypt was a type of the redemption of the chosen seed, and you know that in that case the little ones were to go forth ; nay, not even a hoof was to be left behind. Why not children in the greater deliverance to join in the song of Moses and of the Lamb ? And there is a passage in Ezekiel, for where we have but little, we must pick up even the crumbs, and do as our Master did—gather up the fragments that nothing be lost—there is a passage in Ezekiel, sixteenth chapter, twenty-first verse, where God is censuring his people for having given up their little infants to Moloch, having caused them to pass through the fire, and he says of these little ones, " Thou hast slain *my* children, and delivered them to cause them to pass through the fire ; " so, then, they were God's children ; those little ones who died in the red-hot arms of Moloch while babes, God calls " my children." We may, therefore, believe concerning all those who have fallen asleep in these early days of life, that Jesus said of them, " These are my children," and that he now to-day, while he leads his sheep unto living fountains of water, does not forget still to carry out his own injunction, " Feed my lambs." Yea, to-day even he carrieth " the lambs in his bosom," and even before the eternal throne he is not ashamed to say, " Behold I and the children whom thou hast given me." There is another passage in Scripture which I think may be used. In the first chapter of Deuteronomy there had been a threatening pronounced upon the children of Israel in the wilderness, that, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, they should never see the promised land ;

nevertheless, it is added, "Your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it." To you, fathers and mothers, who fear not God, who live and die unbelieving, I would say, "your unbelief cannot shut your children out of heaven, and I bless God for that. While you cannot lay hold on that text which says, "The promise is unto us and our children, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call," yet inasmuch as the sin of the generation in the wilderness did not shut the next generation out of Canaan, but they did surely enter in, so the sin of unbelieving parents shall not necessarily be the ruin of their children, but they shall still, through God's sovereign grace and his overflowing mercy, be made partakers of the rest which he hath reserved for his people. Understand that this morning I have not made a distinction between the children of godly and ungodly parents. If they die in infancy, I do not mind who is father nor who their mother, they are saved; I do not even endorse the theory of a good Presbyterian minister who supposes that the children of godly parents will have a better place in heaven than those who happen to be sprung from ungodly ones. I do not believe in any such thing. I am not certain that there are any degrees in heaven at all; and even if there were, I am not clear that even that would prove our children to have any higher rights than others. All of them without exception, from whosoever loins they may have sprung, will, we believe, not by baptism, not by their parents' faith, but simply as we are all saved through the election of God, through the precious blood of Christ, through the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit, attain to glory and immortality, and wear the image of the heavenly as they have worn the image of the earthy.

III. I now come to make a PRACTICAL USE OF THE DOCTRINE.

First, let it be a *comfort to bereaved parents*. You say it is a heavy cross that you have to carry. Remember, *it is easier to carry a dead cross than a living one*. To have a living cross is indeed a tribulation,—to have a child who is rebellious in his childhood, vicious in his youth, debauched in his manhood! Ah, would God that he had died from the birth; would God that he had never seen the light! Many a father's hairs have been brought with sorrow to the grave through his living children, but I think never through his dead babes; certainly not if he were a Christian, and were able to take the comfort of the apostle's words—"We sorrow not as they that are without hope." So you would have your child live! Ah, if you could have drawn aside the veil of destiny, and have seen to what he might have lived! Would you have had him live to ripen for the gallows? Would you have him live to curse his father's God? Would you have him live to make your home wretched, to make you wet your pillow with tears, and send you to your daily work with your hands upon your loins because of sorrow! Such might have been the case; it is not so now, for your little one sings before the throne of God. Do you know from what sorrows your little one has escaped? You have had enough yourself. It was born of woman, it would have been of few days and full of trouble as you are. It has escaped those sorrows; do you lament that? Remember, too, your own sins, and the deep sorrow of repentance. Had that child lived,—it would have been a sinner, and it must have known the bitterness of conviction of sin. It has escaped that; it rejoices now in the glory of God. Then would you have it back again? Bereaved parents, could you for a moment see your own offspring above, I think you would very speedily wipe away your tears. There among the sweet voices which sing the perpetual carol may be heard the voice of your own child—an angel now, and you the mother of a songster before the throne of God. You might not have murmured had you received the promise that your child should have been elevated to the peerage; it has been elevated higher than that—to the peerage of heaven. It has received the dignity of the immortals; it is robed in better than royal garments; it is more rich and more blessed than it could have been if all the crowns of earth could have been put upon its head. Wherefore, then, could you complain! An old poet has penned a verse well fitted for an infant's epitaph;—

"Short was my life, the longer is my rest,
 God takes those soonest whom he loveth best,
 Who's born to-day, and dies to-morrow,
 Loses some hours of joy, but months of sorrow.
 Other diseases often come to grieve us,
 Death strikes but once, and that stroke doth relieve us."

Your child has had that one stroke and has been relieved from all these pains, and you may say of it, this much we know, he is supremely blessed, has escaped from sin, and care, and woe, and with the Saviour rests. "Happy the babe," says Hervey, "who,

Privileged by faith, a shorter labour and a lighter weight,
Received but yesterday the gift of breath,
Ordered to-morrow to return to death."

While another says, looking upward to the skies,

"O blest exchange, O envied lot,
Without a conflict crowned,
Stranger to pain, in pleasure bless'd
And without fame, renowned."

So is it. It is well to fight and win, but to win as fairly without the fight! It is well to sing the song of triumph after we have passed the Red Sea with all its terrors; but to sing the song without the sea is glorious still! I do not know that I would prefer the lot of a child in heaven myself. I think it is nobler to have borne the storm, and to have struggled against the wind and the rain. I think it will be a subject of congratulation through eternity, for you and me, that we did not come so easy a way to heaven, for it is only a pin's prick after all, this mortal life; then there is exceeding great glory hereafter. But yet I think we may still thank God for those little ones, that they have been spared our sins, and spared our infirmities, and spared our pains, and are entered into the rest above. Thus saith the Lord unto thee, O Rachel, if thou weepst for thy children, and refuseth to be comforted because they are not: "Restrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears, for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord, and they shall come again from the land of the enemy."

The next and perhaps more useful and profitable inference to be drawn from the text is this: many of you are parents who have children in heaven. Is it not a desirable thing that you should go there, too? And yet have I not in these galleries and in this area some, perhaps many, who have no hope hereafter? In fact, you have left that which is beyond the grave to be thought of another day, you have given all your time and thoughts to the short, brief, and unsatisfactory pursuits of mortal life. Mother, unconverted mother, from the battlements of heaven your child beckons you to Paradise. Father, ungodly, impenitent father, the little eyes that once looked joyously on you, look down upon you now, and the lips which had scarcely learned to call you father, ere they were sealed by the silence of death, may be heard as with a still small voice, saying to you this morning, "Father, must we be for ever divided by the great gulf which no man can pass?" Doth not nature itself put a kind of louging in your soul that you may be bound in the bundle of life with your own children? Then stop and think. As you are at present, you cannot hope for that; for your way is sinful, you have forgotten Christ, you have not repented of sin, you have loved the wages of iniquity. I pray thee go to thy chamber this morning and think of thyself as being driven from thy little ones, banished for ever from the presence of God, cast "where their worm dieth not and where their fire is not quenched." If thou wilt think of these matters, perhaps the heart will begin to move, and the eyes may begin to flow, and then may the Holy Spirit put before thine eyes the cross of the Saviour, the holy child Jesus! And remember, if thou wilt turn thine eye to him thou shalt live: if thou believest on him with all thy heart thou shalt be with him where He is,—with all those whom the Father gave him who have gone before. Thou needest not to be shut out. Wilt thou sign thine own doom, and write thine own death warrant? Neglect not this great salvation, but may the grace of God work with thee to make thee seek, for thou shalt find—to make thee knock, for the door shall be opened—to make thee ask, for he that asketh shall receive! O might I take you by the hand—perhaps you have come from a newly-made grave, or left the child at home dead, and God has made me a messenger to you this morning; O might I take you by the hand and say, "We cannot bring him back again, the spirit is gone beyond recall, but you may follow!" Behold the ladder of light before you! The first step upon it is repentance, out of thyself; the next step is faith, into Christ, and when thou art there, thou art fairly and safely on thy way, and ere long thou shalt be received at heaven's gates by those very little ones who have gone before. that they may come to welcome thee when thou shouldst land upon the eternal shores.

Yet another lesson of instruction, and I will not detain you much longer. What shall we say to parents who have living children? We have spoken of those that are dead, what shall we say of the living? I think I might say, reserve your tears,

bereaved parents, for the children that live. You may go to the little grave, you may look upon it and say, "This my child is saved; it resteth for ever beyond all fear of harm." You may come back to those who are sitting round your table, and you can look from one to the other and say, "These my children, many of them are unsaved." Out of God, out of Christ, some of them are just ripening into manhood and into womanhood, and you can plainly see that their heart is like every natural heart, desperately wicked. There is subject for weeping for you. I pray you never cease to weep for them until they have ceased to sin; never cease to hope for them until they have ceased to live; never cease to pray for them until you yourself cease to breathe. Carry them before God in the arms of faith, and do not be desponding because they are not what you want them to be. They will be won yet if you have but faith in God. Do not think that it is hopeless. He that saved *you* can save *them*. Take them one by one constantly to God's mercy-seat and wrestle with Him, and say, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." The promise is unto you and to your child, even to as many as the Lord your God shall call. Pray, strive, wrestle, and it shall yet be your happy lot to see your household saved. This was the word which the apostle gave to the gaoler, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house." We have had many proofs of it, for in this pool under here I have baptised not only the father and the mother, but in many cases all the children too, who one after another have been brought by grace even to put their trust in Jesus. It should be the longing of every parent's heart to see all his offspring Christ's, and all that have sprung from his loins numbered in the host of those who shall sing around the throne of God. We may pray in faith, for we have a promise about it; we may pray in faith, for we have many precedents in Scripture, the God of Abraham is the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob; but for this good thing he will be inquired of by the House of Israel to do it for them. Inquire of Him, plead with Him, go before Him with the power of faith and earnestness, and He will surely hear you.

One word to all the congregation. A little child was saying the other day—and children will sometimes say strange things—"Papa, I cannot go back again." When he was asked what he meant, he explained that he was here, he had begun his life, and it seemed such a thought to him that he could not cease to be,—he could not go back again. You and I may say the same; here we are; we have grown up, we cannot go back again to that childhood in which we once were; we have therefore no door of escape there. Good John Bunyan used to wish that he had died when he was a child. Then again, he hoped he might be descended from some Jew, for he had a notion that the Hebrews might be saved. That door God has closed. Every door is closed to you and me except the one that is just in front of us, and that has the mark of the cross upon it. There is the golden knocker of prayer: do we choose to turn aside from that to find another,—a gate of ceremonies, or of blood, or of birth? We shall never enter that way. There is that knocker! By faith, great God, I will lift it now. "I, the chief of sinners am, have mercy upon me!" Jesus stands there. "Come in," saith he, "thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without?" He receives me to his arms, washes, clothes, glorifies me, when I come to him. Am I such a fool that I do not knock? Yes, such I am by nature—then what a fool! O Spirit of God! make me wise to know my danger and my refuge! And now, sinner, in the name of him that liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore, lay hold upon that knocker, lift it, give it a blow, and let your prayer be, ere thou leavest this sanctuary, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" May the Lord hear and bless, for his name's sake!