

The Gospel of Mark


Part 34

Heaven for Those Who **Can't** Believe

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

2024.8.11



A publication of  the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Triangle Community Church aims to be a "transforming church". We exist to be used by God as He transforms ordinary people into extraordinary followers of Jesus Christ. TCC believes not only that life-change is possible—but that it is to be expected. Growth is God's will for his people. But transformation does not happen by accident. It requires intentional, intelligent action. 1 Timothy 4:7 instructs you to "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." Since "Talking Points, Walking Points" is intended both for individual reflection and for group discussion, questions vary in degree of vulnerability required. Generally it is best to begin group discussions with questions which involve less personal disclosure—but don't linger there. Be sure to "dive deep" too! The questions which require the greatest openness and honesty, as well as those in the section entitled "Digging Deeper in your Daily Quiet Time", are perfect for private reflection.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- What from Sunday's message interested you? ...made sense to you? ...confused you?
...intrigued you? ...upset you? ...encouraged you? ...and **why**?
- Who knows someone who has been impacted by the tragic loss of a child? Can you tell us about it? Were you able to provide comfort in some way? What helped? What didn't help?
- Review the **Sermon Summary**. Which of Pastor Doug's insights did you already understand?
Which of those insights are new to you? Which ones don't fully make sense to you yet?
How unsettling is it to you that the Bible doesn't just explicitly state: "All infants go to heaven!"?
Do you find Pastor Doug's biblical reasonings sufficient? Are you comforted by them?
- When in need, which would you find easier to trust: [1] a stranger who makes extensive and explicit promises, or, [2] an old friend who has been very sensitive and generous to you in the past? **Why** that one?
How comforting are passages such as Psalm 37:25 and 84:11?
Does it bother you that God **doesn't spell out exactly how** he'll take care of us?
- As a church, how well do you think we do in helping those who've lost a child?
What suggestions might you have for being of even greater help to those in loss?

Sermon Summary Mark 10:13-16

We are working our way through the gospel of Mark and today we explore 10:13-16, in which some parents brought their children to Jesus so that he might bless them. In Jesus' day children weren't highly valued. At best they were merely tolerated—but in today's text Jesus' disciples didn't even do that. They harshly rebuked these parents for bothering Jesus. But you'll recall from 9:37 that Jesus identified with such little ones. In Jesus' eyes, true greatness involves caring about people whom our society considers to be insignificant. When Jesus' disciples rebuked these parents, Jesus became indignant with them (10:14-15). "Indignant" is a very strong term of disapproval meaning to "warn forcefully". In Mark 1:25, this same word described Jesus' rebuke of a demon! Jesus was not happy with his disciples! Like little children, we too are helpless. We are unable to save ourselves. We are totally dependent on the mercy and grace of God. The only way to enter God's kingdom is through his Son. Jesus' response here reveals his compassion for, and defense of, the vulnerable and helpless, for that is what children represented in the first century.

Jesus said that the kingdom of God belongs to children, that we must be like children even to enter it. Luke's account of this event uses a term which applies to infants and even to the unborn. This raises a question that Christians have wrestled with over the centuries: "What happens to children who die who didn't have the ability to repent and believe on Christ as their Savior?" Many who have lost a baby ask, "Will I ever get to see my baby? Will my baby be in heaven?" This is no mere academic, theological discussion. For those of us who have lost a young child, whether through miscarriage, sickness, an accident or abortion, there is no issue more pertinent to us. Historically the church has almost unanimously held that young children and the mentally incompetent are safe in God's keeping, that is, that there is a heaven for those who can't believe. Upon what do we base this assurance?

I. Young children have a unique status before God. Deuteronomy 1:39 seems to be a blanket statement about the nature of young children. They have no knowledge of good or evil, and therefore are unable to make moral judgments. They were not held accountable for sinful actions they could not understand. They cannot will to do either right or wrong. Therefore, they lack moral culpability before God. Many theologians believe that they are in the unique stage of life where God does not hold them morally accountable. Isaiah 7:14-16 recognizes that there is a stage in a young child's life when they are not able to distinguish between good and evil. During such a stage, there is no moral culpability because there is no moral capability. I'm not arguing that such children are sinless. They just lack moral awareness, moral capacity. What I am arguing is that God looks at such children differently. They are not held accountable as they will be when they are older and can discern between good from evil. In Jonah 4:11 God seems reluctant to bring judgment on the city because he recognizes the collateral damage that will come upon children and animals who did not choose the evil that warrants God's judgment. God viewed them differently because of their moral incapacity. In Ezekiel 18:20 God makes it clear that God punishes those who willfully, knowingly sin. (Exodus 20:5, on the other hand, refers to the innocent suffering children typically experience as a result of their parents' foolish, sinful actions.)

II. The biblical grounds for human condemnation do not apply to those who can't discern right from wrong. Romans 1:18-32 states multiple reasons for the wrath of God being poured out. Yet babies cannot suppress the truth of God's existence (v. 18-20), they are not guilty of idolatry (v. 21-25) or of sexual sin (v. 26-27). Romans 2:1-2 identifies the hypocrisy of condemning others for the same sins one commits as grounds for God's judgment. But babies don't pass judgment on others; they are incapable of making such moral judgments. None of these seem to apply to young children who lack the mental and moral capacity to discern good from evil. They cannot consciously choose to practice or approve of those actions they can't understand. Jesus taught that there is a direct relationship between personal knowledge and our moral culpability (see John 15:22). In 2 Samuel 12:19-23 we find the account of David's infant son who died. David clearly believed that he would have a relationship with this child in the afterlife, and this brought him great comfort. It should comfort us as well. Yes, infants are sinners, but I believe that infants will be in heaven because of what Jesus has done on the cross. Let me state the problem this way: should those who are unable to respond to the biblical requirement of faith in Jesus Christ be condemned by virtue of their inability to believe? I think not.

III. God has provided for the salvation of infants and those who can't believe. Christ died for all those condemned in Adam (John 1:29; 1 Timothy 2:6; 1 John 2:2). It is my studied conviction that no one is condemned solely because of personal sin or an inherited sin. Rather they are condemned because they reject Christ's provision for their sin (1 John 3:18). In the case of infants, I believe that the benefits of the cross are applied to those who cannot believe—young children and the mentally impaired (Mark 10:14).

IV. Saving those who cannot believe seems congruent with God's character. In extending forgiveness to those who can't believe, God is not overlooking their sin. No, Christ died for the sins of the world. I think He died not just for those who believe, but also for those who cannot believe.

Because God's cares about those whom society belittles—the weak, the powerless, the defenseless—so must we. They are God's image bearers and we must treat them with love and mercy and dignity. We should pray for the salvation of those who can believe and actively seek opportunities to share Christ with all who will listen. Finally, we must entrust to God the salvation of those who can't believe. There is sufficient biblical warrant for believing in the salvation of those who can't believe.



Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

What if your children refused to believe that you would provide for them unless they had a written, legally-binding statement from you **explicitly enumerating everything** you ever intended to give them? Food? Gotta be written down! Braces or glasses? Better be in print! Clean laundry? Not if it's not in ink! You would plead with your insecure child: "Sweetie, have I **ever** failed to give you something you need? Have you seen my character? Haven't I proven my love for you? Trust me—**please!**"

When considering the eternal destiny of infants or the mentally handicapped, what should we do with the fact that we **cannot** point to a Bible verse which **explicitly answers** the question? Answer: we should look to God's character. Let's consider how others have found comfort in the character of God.

Monday— Read Genesis 18:1-2 & 16-33. What did Abraham do when the city in which his beloved nephew lived was threatened with destruction? Then, paraphrase Abraham's conclusion found in v. 25. How does this principle apply to your concerns about your child who perished in infancy?

Tuesday— From the following passages, write down what God **delights to do**.

- Micah 7:18-20
- Isaiah 62:5 & 65:19
- Jeremiah 32:41-42
- Ezekiel 33:11
- Zephaniah 3:17

Summarize your conclusion about God's character.

Wednesday— From the following passages, write down what God **finds no joy in doing**.

- Lamentations 3:33
- Ezekiel 18:23 & 32 and 33:11

Summarize your conclusion about God's character.

Thursday— We **know** from **many** passages that God **certainly will** pour out his wrath on sinners. There is **no doubt** that he judges sin. Hell **is** real. In the first two lines of Isaiah 28:21 God tells of his intent to punish evildoers, comparing it to previous judgments he'd brought on Mt. Perazim and Gibeon. **But then**, in the final two lines of v. 21, he calls this work of judgment his "**unusual work**", and this labor of destruction his "**exceptional labor**". Relate this to what you learned from yesterday's passages. Now, connecting what you've learned on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, **describe** your God.

Friday— Read 1 Timothy 1:13–16. **How** does Paul describe himself (v. 13 & 15)?

According to v. 16, **why** did God have mercy on Paul? Has God shown mercy on **you**?

Are **you** going to heaven? Yet how do the following verses describe **all** sinners, including **you**?

- Colossians 1:21 & 2:18
- 1 Timothy 6:5
- Titus 1:15
- Romans 1:28; 6:21; 8:6-8, 13
- 2 Corinthians 3:14

You and I **deserved** hell, but God graciously saved us—didn't he?

Saturday— So now, pulling together everything you've learned about God's character, his desire to save and his reluctance to punish, answer the questions which Abraham posed in Genesis 18:25, but relate them to infants and the mentally handicapped who die. True, we have **no explicit** Bible verse which states that God **does** apply the blood of his Son to the sins of "these little ones"—but he did it for you and me! *Isn't it hard to imagine that he **wouldn't** save those who **cannot** believe in him?!*