

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: LITTLE CHILDREN ARE HOLY

Scripture: Doctrine and Covenants 28:13, 14.

Behold, I say unto you, that little children are redeemed from the foundation of the world, through mine Only Begotten; wherefore they cannot sin, for power is not given unto Satan to tempt little children, until they become accountable before me; for it is given unto them even as I will, according to mine own pleasure, that great things may be required at the hand of their fathers. And again I say unto you, that whoso having knowledge, have I not commanded to repent? And he that hath no understanding, it remaineth in me to do according as it is written

Little children are holy, being sanctified through
the atonement of Jesus Christ.

The Puritan attitude towards childhood was a peculiar one -- by today's standards. Children were regarded as sinful, depraved, and lost because of Adam's sin. There was no good in them. Since they inherited Adam's nature, they were enemies to God. They were regarded as naturally rebellious, naturally sinful. Therefore childhood was primarily a time of repression -- a time when parents had the responsibility of curbing the sinful proclivities of their children by stern, uncompromising discipline and sometimes even by harsh physical punishment. Lightness and levity were to be avoided as tending towards sin. Happiness and joy were regarded as out of keeping with piety and sanctity. Children grew up under the constant threat of the horrible sufferings and punishments they would suffer in the future if they died in sin.

It was accepted as axiomatic that even a new born infant was under the curse of Adam's sin. But since a child is incapable of repentance, and incapable of exercising faith unto salvation before the age of accountability, if the child died before reaching that age of accountability when he could repent and exercise faith for himself, he was lost. The period of childhood was therefore to be dreaded and feared, and hurried through as fast as possible in order that the child might come under the conviction of sin, repent, and accept Christ. Childhood was a period to be endured -- not enjoyed.

This philosophy is not yet quite extinct, although now the pendulum of ma-

majority opinion seems to have swung the other way. It seems that today the majority of parents act on the theory that one should never discipline or correct or repress children at all for fear of giving them some kind of complex. Today's style is to let a child do whatever he pleases -- to extend his childhood indefinitely -- to shield him from the hard facts and difficult responsibilities of life as long as possible -- to say nothing to him about sin or repentance -- to place no restrictions or burdens on him -- to let him have a good time as long as he can.

What is the truth about the nature of children? Are they unregenerate, lost, depraved little monsters? Without proper parental teaching and guidance, they certainly can be. They have that potentiality -- that capacity. They receive a certain inheritance from their ancestors back to and including Adam, who first brought sin and death into the world. The tendency to sin is born in their bodies because of this heritage. But this is only half the truth. The potentiality of righteousness is also there. Spiritually they are made in the image and likeness of God -- a little lower than the angels. Jesus said of little children, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Little children do wrong things. They are selfish. They don't always tell the truth. Knowing nothing of property rights, they may take what does not belong to them. When their wills are crossed, they may lose their tempers. But because they have no knowledge of good and evil, they are not accountable. They are

not guilty. They are innocent before God. Where there is no knowledge, and no capacity to choose in the light of that knowledge, there is no guilt; and where there is no guilt there is no sin.

It is a just and reasonable principle of law that every man is responsible for his own acts, and not for the acts of others. We do not punish a child for the sins of his father. Yet the child suffers the consequences of the sins of his father. If the father goes to jail, it is the father who is being punished, but the children suffer the consequences of being without their natural protector and provider. If a man murders, his victim is not punished for murder, but he does suffer the consequences of another's sin. This is what makes sin so heinous and despicable in the eyes of God-- it always brings painful suffering and unpleasant consequences upon innocent people.

You and I and our children are not responsible for or guilty of the sins of Adam. But we are all subject to the consequences of that sin -- an inherent tendency to sin again, and a sentence of physical death. Jesus came to save us not only from the penalties of sin, but also from the consequences of sin. Because all of us have personally sinned and come short of the glory of God, we all need to be forgiven and to have the penalty of sin remitted. If we have reached the years of accountability we may have that penalty remitted on conditions of faith, repentance, and obedience to Jesus Christ. But what of infants and little children? They have no knowledge of good and evil, of right and wrong. They have not the capacity to choose, to believe, to exercise faith. They cannot repent; for they have no knowledge or capacity for choice, and are therefore innocent before God. He imputes no guilt to them. Because they are of Adam's race, they too are subject to death -- the consequences of Adam's fall. But through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus they are redeemed-- rescued from these consequences by being restored to the presence of God, and eventually to eternal life in a perfect, resurrected body.

We believe that the atonement of Jesus is universal. It is efficacious for all men from Adam to the end of time. It is efficacious for all the guilty who will confess their sins, forsake them, and exercise faith on his name. It cancels the consequences of Adam's sin even

for those innocent ones who die in the darkness of ignorance, for the heathen nations and they who knew no law shall come forth in the first resurrection, and it shall be tolerable for them as they stand in the presence of God for judgment because of their lack of knowledge. It is efficacious for infants who die before reaching the age of accountability. Because they are not capable of choosing, they are innocent; they are under no guilt. The atonement of Jesus lifts the consequences of Adam's sin from their heads, and makes them citizens of the heavenly kingdom. "Their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven." "Little children are redeemed from the foundation of the world, through mine Only Begotten." (D.C. 28:13) "For behold, as in Adam, or by nature they fall, even so the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins." (That is, for sins they may commit innocently, in ignorance." (Mos. 1:115) "Little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world." (Moroni 8:13) "Little children can not repent; wherefore it is awful wickedness to deny the pure mercies of God unto them, for they are all alive in him because of his mercy." (Moroni 8:20) "Little children are holy, being sanctified through the atonement of Jesus Christ." (D.C. 74:3)

The ordinance of baptism should be administered only on condition of repentance. Its purpose is the remission of sins which have been confessed and repented of. Therefore as a church we do not baptize infants, but follow the example of Jesus who took them up in his arms and blessed them, saying, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Childhood, then, should be a time of joy, of happiness. It is a time of innocence, for little children are not capable of committing sin which brings them under guilt. No one who has lost an infant child need have any fears about the future of that infant, for Jesus loves little children with a perfect love, and by his atonement has taken the curse of Adam from them, made them whole, and endowed them with eternal life in the kingdom of his Father. We who are guilty of and responsible for sin must repent, have faith in this same Jesus, and obey his gospel laws and ordinances, if we too would become alive in Christ, and dwell in God's kingdom with those little children and their innocent purity.