

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: LITTLE CHILDREN ARE ALIVE IN CHRIST

Scripture: Book of Mormon, Moroni 8:8-13.

The word of the Lord came to me by the power of the Holy Ghost, saying, Listen to the words of Christ, your Redeemer, your Lord, and your God. Behold, I came into the world not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; the whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them; And after this manner did the Holy Ghost manifest the word of God unto me; wherefore my beloved son, I know that it is solemn mockery before God that ye should baptize little children. Behold I say unto you, that this thing shall ye teach, repentance and baptism unto those who are accountable and capable of committing sin; yea, teach parents that they must repent and be baptized, and humble themselves as their little children, and they shall all be saved with their little children: and their little children need no repentance, neither baptism. Behold, baptism is unto repentance to the fulfilling of the commandments, unto the remission of sin. But little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world.

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Everyone loves a baby. Bring even a fairly personable infant into a room of adults, and the baby immediately becomes the center of interest, attention, and even affection. No normal person -- man, woman, or child -- would think of doing anything to harm or injure a baby. Yet according to the teaching of some theology, God is going to condemn infants who die without baptism either to a never-ending fiery hell, or to a "limbo" on the fringes of hell, where they can never come into God's presence or know fully the joys of God's kingdom. If either of these ideas be true, they make God more of a monster than the mentally or emotionally unbalanced human being who tortures, mutilates, or kills a baby; for the human action is limited by time, but God's "punishment" continues through eternity!

The question of infant baptism is one which has been debated by Christians for centuries. We cannot hope to settle it for all time now in one brief radio message, but we can inform you of the teachings of our church on this subject, and explore the logic and the scriptural writings by which we arrive at our conclusions.

We start with two premises which we think are basic and, we hope, acceptable to all Christian people. First is the premise that God is good -- that he is loving, kind, merciful, long-suffering,

and benevolently disposed to his children, but that he is also a just God who works according to inviolable law. And second is the premise that mankind was lost, fallen, and alienated from God by Adam's fall.

Because all of Adam's race are fallen, lost, and alienated from God, it is necessary that every one who would gain entrance to God's presence and God's kingdom should somehow be redeemed, both from the penalties for his own sin and from the consequences of Adam's sin.

Sin is of two kinds. One is "original sin," or the sin of Adam, for which you and I today are in no way responsible. The other is personal sin, sin which we have personally committed and for which we are personally responsible.

Though we are not responsible for or guilty of Adam's sin, every one of us in consequence of that sin inherits two things: (1) the carnal nature which inclines us to personal sin and separates us from God, and (2) inevitable death. We receive this inheritance whether we want it or not, but we are not to blame for it. We are doomed to death not because we are guilty of Adam's sin, but because according to God's laws of heredity, death is the inevitable consequence of Adam's sin for all his posterity. All infants are born subject to these consequences or or-

iginal sin; but they are not penalties for personal guilt.

Being a God of law, our Creator could not be true to his own laws and not allow this law of heredity to operate. Being a God of justice and love and mercy as well, he could not stand unconcernedly by while men suffered the consequences of an ancient, ancestral sin for which they were not in any way responsible. That is why he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world -- to make atonement for ALL sin, but especially for the sin of Adam which had entangled all mankind in its consequences. By that atonement he redeemed ALL men from the death which is the consequence of Adam's sin, and made it possible for every son of Adam to stand in a resurrected and immortal body before the judgment seat of God, in God's presence, there to receive reward or punishment according to the works done in the flesh. This redemption from death is free and infinite. It is efficacious for the heathen nations who never received God's gospel law or covenant, and who never came to a knowledge of Jesus. It is efficacious for little children who die in the innocence of infancy before they are mentally or morally capable of exercising faith in him, or choosing to commit sin. Where there is no knowledge there is no guilt. Where there is no law there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation. Repentance is not necessary to make this redemption efficacious, because there is no logical reason for demanding that others repent for Adam's sin.

We are individually responsible for our personal sins which we have chosen -- or at least allowed ourselves to do; yet even personal sin is covered by Christ's atonement, with one important difference. In personal sin there is personal guilt. Personal repentance is required as a prerequisite of forgiveness of personal guilt.

Infants and little children are innocent. They have no knowledge of good and evil, and therefore no guilt. The consequences of Adam's sin are cancelled by the atonement of Christ. Therefore if an infant dies in his innocence before reaching the years of accountability, he is already a fit subject for the kingdom of heaven, whether he was ever baptized or not. Jesus said that "of such is the kingdom of heaven," and he did not modify that statement by adding, "if they have been baptized." He commanded his followers to become as little children if they wished to enter the kingdom, for little

children are innocent, pure, sinless, and redeemed by the atonement of Christ. Jesus said again of little children that "in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."

Jesus never baptized an infant, or commanded others to baptize them, or taught that they needed baptism. Baptism is for the remission of the believer's own sins. Baptism must be preceded by faith in God and in his Son, Jesus Christ, and by repentance and forsaking of sin. Little children have no personal sin, no capacity to exercise faith, and nothing of which to repent.

Baptism is not a magic rite which confers regeneration regardless of the state of mind and heart and will in the one receiving it. God does not grant that kind of magical power to any men, however good or well-meaning. No ordinance of the church confers any magical merit in and of itself, but is efficacious only as the candidate receives it in worthiness and sincerity of heart. To phrase it another way, the water used in baptism does not wash away sins; you won't find any sins floating in the water after the sinner has been baptized. The washing in water is the outward sign of an inward grace. It is revolting to the moral sense to believe that the act of baptism can remit sin regardless of the candidate's sincere repentance, for if it can, then the most wicked, immoral, and depraved sort of man might receive the magic rite of baptism without repentance, continue in this sin, and still be guaranteed a place in the kingdom of God.

Baptizing infants imputes sin to those who are pure and innocent. It denies the power of Christ's atonement to cancel the consequences of original sin. It violates the reasonable principle that baptism must be preceded by faith and repentance. It takes away the child's agency, for it purports to commit him to a covenant with God before he is legally, morally, or intellectually capable of making a covenant. For these reasons Latter Day Saints do not baptize children until they reach the years of accountability. Rather, we follow the example of Jesus who called little children to him, took them up in his arms, and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16) We believe and teach that "Little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world," and that unless we repent and become as a little child, we can in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.