

What Happens When Children Die?

As the day progressed Friday, our hearts were filled with grief. Grief for the families of Newtown, Connecticut who did exactly what many of you did last Friday -- you dropped your kids off for school, casually said good-bye and planned to get some things done before you joined your kids at the supper table. I was wondering how many parents had already purchased Christmas for their children when they quickly receive a robocall on their cell phones that all parents of kids at Sandy Hook School should come immediately to the Sandy Hook Volunteer Fire Department. What a picture in my mind as I see a mother and father are told there will be no more children brought over from the school. It was reported the wails of mothers were heartbreaking. Children die every day, but rarely so many and so nightmarish as what transpired Friday in Connecticut. What happens when a child dies?

1. If a child has not reached the age of accountability, they go immediately to heaven.

Make no mistake about it, all babies go to heaven. King David said upon the passing of his little son, "...*Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.*" (II Samuel 12:23). David, a man after God's own heart certainly went to Heaven when he died and he was certain he would again see his little son who had just passed into the glory!

There is a theology that gives insight as well. Paul said, "...*for by the law is the knowledge of sin*" (Romans 3:20). The law of God, in other words, the "thou shalt" and the "thou shalt not" tell us what is wrong and what is right and that we have sinned and come short of God's glory (Romans 3:10, 23). If a person does not mentally reach that point, they are not accountable for those sins. James said it like this, "*Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin*" (James 4:17). If we do not know what we are doing is wrong, we will not be held accountable for that sin. Insight was given by Paul in Romans 7:9: "*For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died*" (Romans 7:9). In this world a person is either safe, lost or saved. You are lost if you know the difference between right and wrong and have not come to Jesus for salvation. You are saved if you have the understanding of right and wrong and have come to Jesus. If someone has not come to this understanding, then this person is not accountable, therefore this person is safe. A child who dies before reaching the age of accountability is safe in the arms of Jesus.

2. For children who have reached the age of accountability, God's nature is love and we do not know the mercy He may have extended to a little one who had not yet come to terms with salvation.

Every child I have talked to about Jesus is very sensitive and positive toward the things of God. I was telling someone recently, a child is willing to believe; they have to be taught to be skeptics. In my youth I witnessed to a little boy who seemed to be only about eight years old. Due to his young age and having been reared up in a Jewish home, I did not put pressure on him to pray the sinner's prayer; I simply laid out the beautiful message of redemption to him. I had met him in the backyard of a home in which I was visiting. During our conversation in which he was very interested, his mother called him for dinner. Soon after dinner, he rushed back to the yard where I had witnessed to him and not seeing me, he looked everywhere until he found me sitting on the sofa inside a screened-in den. I'll never forget his words when he spotted me; he cried out, "Hey, Jesus man, would you tell me some more?!"

Now as an older minister, I am convinced more than ever that God is willing to extend His broad plan of salvation to especially include a youngster. Jesus loves the children of the world: "*But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 19:14). In the fleeting moments before those precious children in Connecticut had their lives snuffed out like a little candle under the unkind breath of a person controlled by the very essence of evil, God may have revealed Jesus in a very precious way to those children. In symbolism, I can imagine our Lord like the Shepherd He is, leaning down to pick them up these fragile lambs, giving them the age-old message of His cross, His death, burial and resurrection. The Bible verse that comes to mind is Mark 10:16: "*And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.*" I can see them coming tenderly to Him as Lord and Savior, then being escorted into the presence of the Lord. From momentary chaos to the Prince of Peace, "*...now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your (their) souls*" (1 Peter 2:25). There is no cruelty in our Savior. The promise is true: "*Thou art good, and doest good...*" (Psalm 119:68).

3. Angels are present at the moment of death and escort children into the presence of Christ and loved ones who have gone before.

It cannot be documented, but many a believing parent and some theologians have suspected that little ones are privy to more than usual angel sightings. I read after one who challenges the reader to observe infant's eyes in the early days of their focusing, looking beyond people in the room or their little toys to movement back and forth that we do not see. Some have speculated that in special ways, angels hover just a little closer to the atmosphere of the babies. We do not know this for sure, but what we are sure of is that we do have guardian angels and they are known to watch over the "little ones": "*Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven*" (Matthew 18:10). When departure from this world to heaven takes place, we are assured that just like Lazarus, Jesus tells us, "*And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom...*" (Luke 16:22). Recently, I was told a mother did not want to leave her son's body after he had been declared dead. The good news is this son was not alone; the

moment he breathed his last breath, the angel escort was there and God Himself was there in the person of the Lord Jesus who promises, "...I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).

4. There is the understanding that God was, is and always shall be in control.

Allow me to clarify. God did not drive this young murderer to do what he did to these innocent people. Jesus identifies the instigator in murders and atrocities when He said, "*The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*" (John 10:10). In the Revelation, Satan is called "Apollyon" (Revelation 9:11), which means "Intensive Destroyer." Evil originates and is driven by Satan and his forces of darkness. Everywhere Jesus went during His ministry He was dogged by demonic forces ever desiring to thwart the plans of God. In the book of Acts we see the spiritual warfare. Paul said, "*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*" (Ephesians 6:12). Although we are involved in this spiritual warfare, we need never fear that when the Destroyer does his worst that God is limited and cannot simultaneously do His best! I cannot always explain in detail how this works, but by faith I believe and accept all things (not just some things) are working together for God's glory and our good (Romans 8:28). Joseph explained to his brothers who, years earlier had planned his death, but instead faked his death and sold him into slavery. They did not know that although they had planned and done evil against him, that God had a "checkmate" move against Satan that eventually brought him to becoming the highest man in Egypt after Pharaoh and, in God's timing, saved the world from starvation. You might say; man's little plans and Satan's devices were foiled. Here is the way Joseph said it, "*But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive*" (Genesis 50:20).

The Almighty, Omniscient, Omnipotent God is sovereign and knows things we do not know. Let's trust Him to convert even this catastrophe into something of redeeming value.

-Pastor Pope-