

A SPECIAL WORD FROM DAVID PLATT



The Incarnation and Children's Hospital

Colossians 1:15-20

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." Colossians 1:15-20

As I was preparing Saturday night to begin preaching a series on the Incarnation, I had the opportunity to visit one-year-old Ella Grace Dorsey and her family in Children's Hospital where she peacefully rested in her parents' arms in the closing moments of her life here. This followed the tragic loss of a teenager represented in our faith family the week before and preceded another unexpected loss in the week to come. As I drove home Saturday night, I could not help but to consider how the implications of the person of Christ leap off of Scripture's pages and into the reality of life's sufferings. As fully God and fully man, Jesus is the anchor who holds all things together. Consider the truths--the hooks of the anchor, so to speak--which spring from Colossians 1 in the midst of the loss of a small child...

We are all fearfully and wonderfully made by Jesus Himself.

We know that God created us in His own image (Genesis 1:27). Psalm 139 says, "You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

Now millions of people don't believe this. They believe we are evolutionary products of time. They say we are single-celled organisms run amuck, cosmic accidents with no real rhyme or reason. Richard Dawkins, avowed atheist from Oxford, writes, "In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at the bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no other good. Nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music."

As a pastor, I am glad I do not have to tell families who are suffering that they are just dancing to the music of DNA. Some get lucky and some don't. This is the end of the atheistic worldview, and it is insufficient, unviable, and untrue. Over and against the atheistic view of life, Scripture says in Colossians 1:16, Psalm 8, and a host of other verses that we are the crowning glory of the creation of God through Christ. Even with all the struggles Ella Grace experienced in her short life, she was created by Christ in the image of God Himself. He knit her together. She was no accident. She is not the result of random processes. And whether our bodies function perfectly or our bodies struggle persistently, we are the crowning glory of His creation. Ella Grace--and all of us--was fearfully and wonderfully made by Jesus Himself.

Though the plan of our lives is different, the purpose of our lives is the same.

Colossians 1 tells us that we are created by him and for him. Isaiah 43:7 says we were created for God's glory. God tells Jeremiah that before he was born God set Him apart and appointed Him for a great purpose (Jeremiah 1:5). Paul reflects this truth later in Galatians 1:15. God's purpose for our lives was decided before we were born. We exist for the glory of God.

This truth encompasses all of us, including Ella Grace. Part of her purpose was fulfilled on earth. The rest will be fulfilled in heaven. And no one can even begin to estimate the magnitude of how she fulfills that purpose in either place. We have no idea what God in His infinite wisdom has set in motion through the life and death of this one-year-old girl. She was created to glorify God. She did for the last year, and she is today--in ways that we cannot fathom.

Ella Grace and other children like her are safe in the presence of Jesus.

We must always be careful to let God's Word and not our circumstances alone dictate our theology. When an infant dies, we want to believe that they are with Christ, even though they obviously have not believed in Him. But what does God's Word say about young children who die?

I want to give you three primary reasons based on God's Word why I believe young children who die go to heaven. The first reason is because God is gracious, merciful, and good. Genesis 18:25 asks, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Everything God does is good and right and just. He wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of Him (Matthew 18:14; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). Whatever God does is right and good and loving. However, this does not mean that everyone goes to heaven, because the Bible clearly teaches that we all have sin which separates us from God. We'll come back to that in a minute, but suffice to say at this point that God cares about children deeply and delights in showing His goodness to them (see Matthew 18:1-6).

The second reason I believe young children who die will go to heaven is because the Bible expresses confidence that believers will see young children after death. After losing his own young son, David worships God and says, "Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me" (2 Samuel 12:23). Then David comforts his wife with this hope. The Bible expresses confidence and a comfort that parents who themselves trust in God's salvation will be with their children again.

The final reason I believe young children who die will go to heaven is because young children are held to a different measure of accountability before God. At this point, some have referred to an "age of accountability"--a certain age when a child becomes accountable before God for his or her sin. But that is not what I am talking about. In Scripture, we see that God holds us accountable for judgment before Him based on a couple of criteria. First, we have an understanding of right and wrong. Romans 2:14-16 says that we have a moral law written on our hearts so that all people everywhere know good and evil, right and wrong. However, Deuteronomy 1:34-39 speaks of "little ones... your children who do not yet know good from bad."

The children in Deuteronomy were not held accountable for the disobedience of the Israelites in their day, and as a result, even though God had cursed the Israelites because of their disobedience, the children were able to enter the Promised Land. The second criteria which affects our standing before God in judgment is found in Romans 1:18-21. There we see that God has revealed His glory to all people and we stand before Him with no excuse because all of us have rejected His glory. However, if a child is unable to know His glory, to perceive it, because a child does not have the physical ability to

recognize God's revelation, then that separates young children from us. They are not "without excuse" (Romans 1:20). Therefore, they will not be judged in the same way we are judged.

Now this does not mean that young children stand innocent before God. The Bible is clear that we all have a sinful nature at the core of who we are; therefore, no one is innocent (Ephesians 2:3; Romans 3:9-20). A child does not learn to sin; he or she expresses the sinful nature that is inherent in all of us. Therefore, anyone who is saved from God's judgment is saved because of God's grace in Christ. Colossians 1 says we are only reconciled to God through Christ.

So when we put these truths together, we realize God's Word teaches that young children who die stand before God with a different measure of accountability. However, they still need the grace and righteousness of Christ attributed to them in some way. Based on the goodness, mercy, and justice of God, we believe that God does attribute that grace and righteousness to them. How does He do this? In a way that is known only to God in His infinite wisdom. And this leads us to say with the confidence and comfort of David that Ella Grace is safe in the presence of Jesus. In the end, Jesus gets all glory for bringing young children safely to Himself.

The primary answer to our pain is found in His presence.

At the root of the Incarnation is the truth that God became like us. He dwelled among us in the person of Christ. His name is Immanuel--"God with us."

When Job experienced great pain and suffering, God asked him 64 questions which above all revealed His presence. God could have written Job a book on the problem of evil. But I'm convinced any such dialogue would only have led to question after question that in the end, Job would never completely understand. Instead, God showed Himself to Job. In suffering, God brought Job to the point of encountering Him face to face, which is humanity's supreme happiness. And Job concluded, "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted... My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you" (Job 42:1-6).

There are so many questions that our faith family has experienced in the last week for which there are not answers. But we need to remember: the answer to suffering is ultimately not an answer at all; it is the Answerer. Our questions at the core are asking, "God, where are You?" And the Answerer is there, sitting beside us in the lowest places of our lives. Are we broken? He was broken. Are we rejected? He was rejected. Do we cry out because we can't take it anymore? He was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. Are our tenderest relationships broken? He too loved and was rejected. It's why Corrie Ten Boom could write from the horror of a Nazi death camp, "No matter how deep our darkness, he is deeper still."

The hymn-writer, Annie Johnston Flynt, wrote this:

*He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase
To added affliction, he addeth his mercy
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace
When we have exhausted our store of endurance
When our strength has failed and the day's half done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources
Our Father's own giving has only begun
His love has no limit*

*His grace has no measure
His power has no boundaries known unto men
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth and giveth and giveth again.*

This hymn was not written by a successful Hollywood film actress. It was written by a woman who was orphaned very early in life, crippled with rheumatoid arthritis, a woman who spent most of her life in bed and had eight pillows cushioning her body from head to toe because her body was covered with sores for all those years. A woman who had lost control of her internal organs, and a woman for whom cancer was sapping away her life. He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater. The primary answer to our pain is found in His presence.

Our suffering is temporary, but our satisfaction is eternal.

The characteristics of God most often questioned in the middle of suffering are His goodness and His power. How could God be good and let this happen? Did He not have the power to stop this from happening? This is why Rabbi Harold Kushner said in his book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* that God is doing the best He can under the circumstances, but He lacks the power to stop certain things from happening. But this idea misses the fact that God's goodness and power are most clearly displayed not through temporary healing, but through eternal healing. It is not possible for us to understand why some people are healed and some are not. We look at Acts 12 and see the miraculous deliverance of Peter from prison and we rejoice. But we can't forget that in the same chapter James was beheaded. Why was James beheaded and Peter delivered? We do not know. Yet we do know that in the end, both James and Peter were ultimately delivered!

And this is the foundation for why we can say today that Ella Grace and the others from our faith family who lost their lives this week are happier today than the happiest person on the face of this earth has ever been. Psalm 16:9 says, "My heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave... You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." When we think of pleasure, we think of family and friends, food and fun. But I assure you, Ella Grace does not now regret missing any of the pleasures of this world. In fact, the pleasures she now enjoys make all of our pleasures seem extremely boring in comparison. And that is a marvelous picture of the goodness and power of God!

Every one of our lives is fleeting.

The longest life of any person in this world is as mist. James 4:14 says, "You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." What this means is that the length of a one-year-old life and the length of a 100-year-old life are virtually indistinguishable in light of eternity. Our lives are not guaranteed tomorrow any more than Ella Grace's life was guaranteed today.

This final "hook" on the anchor places an urgency in each of our lives to submit to Christ. The truths of Colossians 1:15-20 concerning Christ are clear:

- We are created BY him.
- We have a purpose to live FOR him.
- We can all be saved IN him.
- We find our comfort WITH him.
- We long for eternal pleasure THROUGH him.
- One day we will stand BEFORE him.

This week, three precious people from our faith family stood before Him, and by the grace and righteousness of Christ attributed to them--even to this precious one-year-old girl, they now enjoy His presence forever. May we likewise trust in Him for the salvation of our sins and look to Him as the anchor of hope in the middle of our sufferings.

--Dr. David Platt
December 6, 2006