Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Today’s topic is a painful topic for some of us because we have suffered miscarriage or still birth or infant death. And there is surely nothing more painful to endure than the death of an infant, whether that be in-utero or at a young age.

And the fact is that we live in a time where infant mortality rates are *far lower* than they were in the time when the Canons of Dort were written. Many more parents, in those days, had children who died in infancy. And so, parents would call the minister or the elders in this time of distress to seek words of comfort.

Now, just by way of explanation, for those new to this sermon series, by Calvinism we mean the biblical doctrines of grace that are outlined in the Canons. And the Arminians were those who held to the views that the Synod of Dort was called to consider and refute. And in those days, the Arminians were using the situation of infant death to mock the doctrine of election and to try and get church members to abandon Calvinism altogether. And they did this by saying saying that Calvinism gave parents no basis for comfort or assurance about the election and salvation of their dead infants. And that is because the children of believers might be elect or they might be reprobate, and you simply could not know which they were; the faith of their parents, the baptism of the children, and prayers on their behalf; none of it was of any help to them.

And you can well imagine the distress that this teaching was causing in Reformed churches in a time when there were many infant deaths. And making it even more difficult, according to Arminian beliefs, all the children of believers who die young go to heaven. And that sounded very appealing.

So, this is why we have this article of the Canons. This aspect of the doctrine of election had very real pastoral implications. And even though the infant mortality rate may be much lower today than it was back then, that doesn’t make this matter any less important for parents who lose an infant today. And even if this does not happen to us, personally, it will happen to fellow believers whom we love. So, we should all want to understand **what the Bible has to say about the children of believers who die in infancy**. And we want to be careful to say no more and no less than what the Bible says. So, three points this afternoon: First: What the Bible *Does Not* Teach, Second: What the Bible *Does* Teach; and Third: What this Means for Believing Parents Whose Children Die in Infancy.

1. So, first of all, **What the Bible Does *Not* Teach**.
   1. As I said a moment ago, the Arminian view is that all the children of believers go to heaven. But today it is a common view amongst professing Christians that **all children who die young, whether they are the children of believers or unbelievers, go to heaven**. And part of the reason for this view is the rejection of the concept of original sin or total depravity. So, young children are viewed as morally neutral; until they are old enough to knowingly choose sin and reject Christ, if they die, they go to heaven.
      1. And this age is called **the age of accountability**. There is no consensus on what the exact age of accountability is because the Bible certainly does not specify a particular age. So, some suggest seven years old, some even go as high as 18, but most do not specify an age. They simply hold to the view that all children who die young go to heaven.
      2. And I have to add that this view is **not restricted to Arminians**. There are committed Calvinists who also believe that all children who die at a young age go to heaven.
         1. For example, in a pastoral letter published in the wake of a shooting at a US primary school, **Rev. Al Mohler**, President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, spoke about the dead children saying, “There is biblical precedent for believing that the Lord made provision for them in the atonement accomplished by Christ, and that they are safe with Jesus.”
         2. And **Rev. John Macarthur**, Pastor of Grace Community Church in Los Angeles, believes that there is an age of accountability at which children can really understand their sin and need of a Saviour. He doesn’t specify the age, because he doesn’t believe the Bible specifies the age, but if any child dies before that age, they go directly to heaven. Appearing on the Larry King show after 9/11, he was asked about a two year old lying at the bottom of the rubble. His answer? “Instant heaven.” And Larry King, knowing that Rev. Macarthur believes in total depravity and election, said, “Wasn’t a sinner?” To which Rev. Macarthur replied, “Instant heaven.”
         3. And in case you are wondering where this thinking comes from, in a booklet about this that Rev. Macarthur wrote, he appealed to the story of Jonah and how God showed compassion on the city because it contained “*120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left hand.*” And he believes this is a reference to young children, which proves the case, as far as he was concerned.
   2. Now, this view obviously appeals to the emotions. It appeals to the idea that children are, you know, **cute and innocent**. Here is an honesty test: If I were to ask you to put up your hand if you like the idea that all young children who die go to heaven, would put up your hands. I am sure many of us would. But let me ask you this also: This morning we read from Genesis 6 about demons possessing men who then married women and produced demon possessed offspring. And these offspring were so wicked, all the time, that the Lord said, I will destroy the whole earth with a flood. And what about all the young children in Sodom and Gomorrah, or those who perished during the 10th plague in Egypt, or the children of the Canaanite nations who God ordered Israel to utterly wipe out. Were all these taken to heaven? In **Psalm 137:8-9**, the Psalmist says this of the deserved judgment that was coming to wicked Babylon: “*O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us! Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!*” Was God now under obligation to take the little ones of Babylon into heaven? We shall have more to say about this, shortly, but the answer is No; no one deserves heaven.
   3. And I hesitate to go to this next observation because to even utter it is perverse and beyond awful, but if we could know beyond any shadow of doubt that all children who die young definitely go to heaven, then it would seem rather irresponsible for believing parents to let their children grow old, if you know what I mean. For wouldn’t it stand to reason that each year you let your children live, you are actually increasing their chances of becoming old enough to maybe go to hell. But that is enough said about that foolishness.
2. Well, in order for us to be able to respond to the idea that all children who die young go to heaven, we have to continue on from **What the Bible Does *Not* Teach** to **What the Bible *Does* Teach**, as our second point.
   1. If I were to ask you for the verse of the Bible that best expresses the spiritual status of infants, what Bible verse would you suggest? I hope it is **Psalm 51:5**: That is where the Psalmist says, “*Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me*.” So, we are not innocent of sin as infants; we are sinful.
      1. And as we have seen in recent weeks, this is because, as human beings, we **inherit a sinful nature from our forefather Adam**. Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 are very clear about this: “… *one trespass led to condemnation for all men*.” So, even before we commit our own sins, we have a sinful nature.
      2. And here is another question for you: **What are the wages of sin?** Death. We die because we are guilty sinners. So, the very fact that infants die is evidence that they are guilty sinners.
      3. And what all this means then is that infants, just because they are infants, do not deserve heaven; in fact, as guilty sinners, they deserve hell.
      4. So, the Bible does not teach that all children who die young go to heaven.
   2. Well, what then does the Bible teach about how we go to heaven? It teaches us about **God’s grace**; God’s undeserved favour towards wretched and guilty sinners through Jesus Christ. As **Romans 6:23** says, “*The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*.” And this is true for adult and child and infant. So, if you are here today as an adult or a youth or an older child, and you have not yet trusted in Jesus Christ for your salvation, I call on you, right now, to do so. In and of yourself, you are a guilty sinner in God’s eyes. Your only hope of eternal life is faith in Jesus Christ. So, go to Him in prayer; confess your sins, trust in His finished work on the cross, and commit yourself to strive to obey His commands.
   3. But there is more that the Bible teaches about **the children *of believers***:
      1. Way back in **Genesis 17**, God entered into a covenant with Abraham and his children and future generations. In other words, God established a special relationship with believers and their children. Now, we know that not all of Abraham’s children or all the people of Israel were elect and were saved. And this revealed itself in their unbelief and rebellion. But the point is that God does view the children of believers as in covenant, while the children of unbelievers are not in covenant.
      2. And we see this same language in **Isaiah 59:21**: To believers, God said, “"*As for me, this is my covenant with them … My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever," says the LORD.*” God extended His promises and blessings to the children of believers.
      3. And as we come into the New Testament, unsurprisingly, we see the same language in **Acts 2:39**: To those seeking to be saved, Peter explained that they must repent and be baptized. And then, he continued, “*The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off*-- *for all whom the Lord our God will call*.” Again, God extended His promises and blessings to the children of believers.
      4. And then there is the verse that is explicitly referred to in our Canon’s article: **1 Cor. 7:14b**: For there, to oppose those who assumed that the children of just one believing parent would be “*unclean*” or ‘not in covenant,’ Paul said, on the contrary, that they are “*holy*”; they are ‘in covenant.’ So, God views the children of believers as in covenant children. But this **does not mean** that all the children of believers are elect and saved. That would be top say more than the Scripture says.
3. But we also do not want to say less than the Scripture says. So, now that we have seen **What the Bible Does Teach About the Children of Believers**, we can turn to our third point, which is **What all this Means for Believing Parents Whose Children Die in Infancy**. If you have lost a little one or if you one day lose a little one, what comfort is there in the gospel? And what can I or the other elders or any of us say to parents in our congregation who lose a little one?
   1. Well, in the **2 Samuel 12** passage that we read earlier, we have the clearest example in the whole Bible of a child of believers dying in infancy.
      1. And as we read, David fasted and prayed and would not sleep while the child remained alive. But once David learned of the death of the child, he washed and anointed himself and got dressed and went to the house of the Lord to worship Him, and then he ate. And we also read that David comforted his wife. And when his servants asked him about this change of behaviour and attitude, David replied, “*While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'Who knows whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live.' But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?*” And then note these words: “*I will go to him, but he will not return to me*.”
      2. Now, you simply cannot read this passage and view it as David just resigning himself to not knowing anything about the eternal destiny of his son and just getting on with life. David had no reason to doubt the election and salvation of his son.
   2. But it is very important that we understand why, as the Canons puts it, “God-fearing parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in their infancy.” And we see this, very briefly, with 3 S-words as we draw to a close – Sovereignty, Scripture, and Surety.
      1. So, first of all, **Sovereignty**.
         1. Note the last words of the Canon’s article: “… who God calls out of this life in their infancy.” Why did David’s son die, ultimately? It wasn’t because of David’s sin. It wasn’t the devil who took him. It wasn’t just a tragic accident. It didn’t just happen for no good reason. God called David’s son out of this life. So, a part of David’s comfort was trusting in His sovereign God, who, as Romans 8 promises us, “… *causes all things to work for the good of those who love Him*.” And it is the same with all the children of believers who die in infancy; it is God who calls them out of this life in their infancy.
         2. Do you see the comfort of that truth? And it is a timely truth in our Covid world! Your life and the life of your children are in God’s hands. He knows, already, the exact moment that you and they will breathe their last, whether that be in old age or at a young age. And He has determined the length of those days for our good and for His glory.
      2. And secondly, our Canons article directs our comfort to **Scripture**. We read, “*We must judge concerning the will of God from His Word*.”
         1. As we saw earlier, we are foolish to seek comfort from the ‘cuteness’ or the wrongly assumed moral innocence of infants. By their nature, our children, just like us, are guilty sinners who deserve hell.
         2. And as we saw last time, God does have a Book of life in which the names of all His elect ones are written. But He has not given us access to that Book.
         3. What He has given us is the Bible. And that is where we must seek our comfort. For it is in the Bible that we see that God is a God of amazing grace, compassion, and mercy. And it is in the Bible that we see that the children of believers are “*holy,*” because they and their parents are in covenant with the God who promises to show “*His steadfast love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments*.”
         4. So, we seek our comfort in the concrete, objective, black and white words of Scripture. In other words, we seek our comfort in the *promises* of God and the *God* of the promises.
      3. And that brings us thirdly and lastly to **Surety**. And surety means certainty or assurance. Our Canon’s article says, “Godly parents **ought not to doubt** the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in their infancy.”
         1. In the days when the Canons were written, it was utterly wicked of the Arminians to try and lead believing parents to reject Calvinism altogether by suggesting that it gave them no certainty about the eternal destiny of their children was utterly wicked.
         2. And that is why the authors of the Canons, based on all the Scriptural teaching that we have considered, wanted to be very clear: “Godly parents **ought not to doubt** the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in their infancy.” Isn’t that beautiful!

And I hope and pray that should you ever find yourself in a funeral service where there is a small coffin at the front of the church, that you, as the godly parents of the child, or as the brothers and sisters of the godly parents, may know the comfort that arises from what we have seen about Sovereignty, Scripture, and Surety. Amen.