

Our Children at Mount Zion – *Psalm 99:1-3, Heb 12:18-24*

Introduction – One important distinction of the American church in the 20th and 21st Century has been the encouragement and sometimes requirement of keeping little children out of the worship service. This is a natural outflow of our radical individualistic way of thinking of ourselves, the members of our family, and the united body of Christ. It is also a natural result of a rationalistic view of what the worship service is all about. One of the main goals of the Reformation was to bring the church back to a biblical understanding of the worship service. We need to grow in a more mature and biblical understanding of what it means to worship as God's people in His presence; this will provide us with the right foundation to then understand whether or not little children should be here with us.

Worship at Mount Zion – In Psalm 99:1-3 we are given a picture of the reigning LORD. He is in Zion, referring both to the place where God gathers His people in worship as well as the covenant people themselves (i.e. Psalm 97:8, Isaiah 1:27). He is in the Holy of holies, dwelling between the cherubim, and from there, when He speaks with and to His people, the earth is shaken. He is holy and therefore we are to praise His *“great and awesome (terrible) name.”*

Our Worship at Mount Zion – In Heb 12:18-24 we are told that we are at that same mountain. We are at a much greater and more fearful place than when Moses gathered God's people at Mount Sinai. This does not happen during personal devotional times but during holy convocations of the *“general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven.”* This is why elsewhere we are told that we not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Heb 10:25). In Lord's Day worship, we are gathering in covenant renewal before the LORD at Mount Zion. In 12:25-29 we are told that, as in Psalm 99, the LORD speaks and the earth and the heavens are shaken, and we are warned to approach with reverence and godly fear *“for our God is a consuming fire.”*

The Need for Faith – How would we come to believe that we are in the company of angels before the throne of God in this assembly? Hebrews 11 gave us the answer. People do and believe the strangest things when they have been granted evangelical faith (11:1ff). This is not a faith that comes from within ourselves – it is the gift of God (Eph 2:8-9), stirred up by the proclamation of the Word (Rom 10:17) and in the midst of this sacred assembly (Heb 10:19-25).

Covenant Renewal for Whom? – When Moses called the people to assemble, he called *“all the men of Israel, your little ones and your wives...that you may enter into covenant with the LORD your God”* (Deut 29:10-12). God's covenant promises belong to *“you, your children, and your children's children”* (Ezek 37:25). Paul instructs the children directly as covenant members (Eph 6:1-3). In this service of worship, all of the covenant people of God are brought before Him for renewal.

Jesus and Infants – In Luke 18:15-17, Jesus Himself makes clear that it is appropriate for children to be brought into His presence. And so, as a rule, covenant children should be present with the congregation for worship. The sound of infant voices in our midst is the sound of God's covenant blessing, the sound of God being praised and our enemies being silenced (Psalm 8:2). The sounds of parents quietly directing or correcting their children or even the cry of one being taken out for a more personal time of discipline ought to cause us great delight. Another one is being brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Therefore, it ought to be the normal Christian activity that children of all ages are in the worship service.

Taking in Far More Than You Would Guess – Little children are sponges, soaking in new information at an amazing rate and astonishing us with their comments and responses. The fact that they cannot articulate all that we impart to them does not stop us from teaching them; much of what they learn is through imitation and mimicking. In fact, being grown up is no guarantee that one will learn or comprehend anything (Luke 10:21). God is clearly capable of communicating with and receiving praise from even nursing children (Psalm 8:2 again). We want our children growing up always thinking that this service is for *them* and not only for the big people.

Some Assembly Required – Of course, it is not enough to just “show up” with your children. They need instruction, examples, practice, encouragements, rewards and correction. There can be a number of reasons that the nursery is a prudent decision today. However, your goal as a parent is to instruct your children not only to sit still, but to participate with God's people in the service of worship. Practical suggestions include –

Make the rules clear – what are the appropriate rules of behavior for your children, considering their frame? Be clear and consistent.

Practice – for public worship during your family worship.

Prepare for their needs – some need to burn off some energy before the service, others need to quiet down; they probably all need to use the restroom and get a drink of water.

Feel free to get up – It is a joy to hear them with us and it is thoughtful for you at some point to take them out for a short time. Remember also that toddler-worship will look different.

Feel free to use the nursery – parents and others are organizing our nursery; it's a good place to use from time to time, and from stage to stage. Also use the training rooms.

Can you help someone else – look around. Who needs help and can you offer?

And to the Children – It is vital that you understand that you were not placed into this Christian home, nor into this church, by accident. God placed you personally in the home of Christians, has bestowed His favor upon you, and has summoned you by name to this place. He requires you to obey your parents in their instruction and to believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ – a faith He grants to you by grace.