

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 49

Halifax, 17 August 2008

Q. 49 How did Christ humble Himself in His death?

A. Christ humbled Himself in His death, in that, having been betrayed by Judas, forsaken by His disciples, scorned and rejected by the world, condemned by Pilate, and tormented by His persecutors; having also conflicted with the terrors of death and the powers of darkness, felt and borne the weight of God's wrath, he laid down His life an offering for sin, enduring the painful, shameful, and cursed death of the cross.

Introduction:

This is now the fourth question from the Larger Catechism on the humiliation of Christ.

- We saw in question 46 that Christ emptied Himself of His glory for our sake.
 - I have been emphasising the fact that He did not empty Himself of His essential glory because that would mean that He stopped being God...
 - and that would be impossible!
 - God can't stop being God!
 - But in the incarnation, (as we saw back in questions 36 & 37)
 - Christ acquired to Himself a second nature—a human nature—in which He came to us—into our world—to redeem us.
 - He did not cease being divine, but he added a human nature so that He had two entire and distinct natures.
 - And in His human nature, He came to us in great humiliation.
 - In this nature, His glory was veiled—
 - In our nature, He was able to suffer and to be spit upon and even to die.
 - This was an unspeakable humbling of Himself...
 - For the Son of God to stoop so low as this!
 - He was willing to lay aside His glory and to come to us in this form, all in order that He might redeem us.
 - If He had appeared to us in His divine nature, we would have been utterly undone—
 - even those who saw visions of God were overwhelmed and felt that they would die for having seen Him...

- and in these visions the brightness of His glory was turned way down.
- If He had appeared in His full glory, they would indeed die.

- Over the last couple of weeks we have looked at how Christ humbled himself...
 - first, in His conception and birth...
 - then, in His life,
 - and now, this week, we will look at how he humbled himself in His death.

- This question speaks of the very lowest point to which He stooped...
 - This is the very deepest degree of His humiliation...
 - As Philippians 2 puts it,
 - **“He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death...”**
 - And then it goes on to show that it was a very lowly form of death...
 - “He humbled Himself and become obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”
 - It is as if to say,
 - our Creator subjected Himself even to death, and as if that was not enough,
 - to a very shameful kind of death—even the death of the cross.

This evening I want to look at three aspects of our Lord’s humiliation at His death.

1. First, that He was forsaken by His own...
2. Secondly, that He was officially condemned by the world...
3. Thirdly, that He was cursed by God the Father.

We will have a separate scripture reading for each point.

First,

I. Christ’s humiliation at death is seen in that He was forsaken by His own.

READ> Mark 14:43-50, 66-72

- Here, Jesus disciples humiliate Him in that...
 - One betrays Him,
 - One denies Him,
 - And all forsake Him.

A. These were our Lord's closest friends...

1. You must understand that they were very important to Him.

a. He said that He esteemed them as more than His very own family.

- On one occasion when he was told that his mother and brothers had come, looking for him,

- He said,

- **Mark 3:33: "Who is My mother, or My brothers?"**

- **Mark 3:34: And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers!"**

b. He has given three years to them, caring for them, ministering to them.

- How patient He had been with their slowness to understand, how kind He had been, how tenderly He had instructed them day after day.

- How many prayers He had lifted up to His Father for them...

c. He loved them to the very end and that with a love much deeper than any love we have every had.

- In His great prayer of John 17 just before He died,

- you can see His love for them as He prays for them with eager anticipation that they will see the glory that He had with the Father from before the foundation of the world.

- He wanted them to be with Him in heaven for ever...

- He wanted that so much that He was willing to bear the curse for them!

- Such love like this is entirely unknown!

- It is a love that is exclusively that of the Lord Jesus Christ!

TRANS> This makes it all the worse that they, whom He so loved, should forsake Him.

2. We may say that these represent all of His people.

a. What I mean is, as Jesus was alive on the earth at a time in history,

- His interaction as a man with these disciples was, in a sense, His interaction with the whole church

- all His people in all ages...

- Judas and Peter and the rest of the twelve were the ones with whom Jesus was personally connected as they were His contemporaries...

- but they represent all the rest.

- b. The way they responded to Him at the time of His death is a representation of the way we all responded to Him...
 - In His moment of deepest distress, they were callous and indifferent...
 - When they slept in the garden of Gethsemane, the whole church slept...
 - When they denied Him and forsook Him,
 - they did exactly as we who live today would have done if we had been there...
 - they did exactly what Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would have done if they had been there...
 - The whole church was represented by those disciples who were His contemporaries.

B. Just look at them...

1. There is Judas the apostate

- a. Psalm 41:9 refers to this...
 - **Ps 41:9: Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.**
 - Many of you have had the disturbing experience of a friend who turned against you—
 - but none of you have had a friend that you gave so much to as our Lord Jesus gave to Judas,
 - because none of you love like Jesus.
 - Your love is such that your friend's betrayal always has at least some justification,
 - but Jesus had loved Judas with a perfect love.
- b. We see that still there are apostates...
 - Those who walk with our Lord for a while and then reject Him after a time.
 - We have them among us today...
 - It is a horrendous thing that they could see who He is, see His love and His care, and yet betray Him.
 - Jesus had to bear this sorrow at the time of His death.
- c. You may say, but Jesus knew that this would happen...
 - Indeed He did,

- but in His human nature,
 - He was earnest in His prayers for Judas, even as He was earnest when He prayed that the cup of suffering might pass from Him...
 - He yearned for Judas even as we yearn for those we love who reject the Lord.
 - He loved Judas better than you love your unbelieving father or your unbelieving child...
 - He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

TRANS> So there is Judas the apostate...

2. Then there is Peter the denier...

- a. Peter was indeed ready to die with Jesus in battle—
 - He was ready to be a hero in battle—
 - he had indeed pulled out his sword against the army that came to arrest the Lord against impossible odds.
 - But his fault was that he was still as opposed to the cross as he was at Caesarea Philippi where he had been sharply rebuked by Jesus for forbidding him to go to the cross...
 - If Jesus was going to fight like a lion, Peter was ready to die for Him,
 - but if Jesus was going to give Himself as a lamb for the slaughter, Peter was ready to renounce Him.
- b. In this we can see how little sympathy His disciples had for the cause for which He came...
 - We have the whole lot of them forsaking Him.
 - He had to suffer alone...
 - They had no idea at this time that He was bearing the wrath and curse of God for them.
 - Therefore, He had to endure all this without a friend...
 - Yes, He had those who loved Him and pitied Him as He suffered the agonies of crucifixion,
 - but there were none who had the slenderest notions of what He was actually bearing for them...
 - That was not to come until later...
 - It was part of His humiliation that He had to bear these things alone.

- And when I say that we would have done the same thing if we had been there,
 - I mean that we would have done the same thing if had had the same revelation they had...
 - Now we are more prepared to suffer with Him because we know why He suffered,
 - but if we did not yet understand, we might be ready to fight, but we would not be ready to lay down our lives as sheep for the slaughter.

TRANS> What a thing it was for the Son of God to be forsaken by His very own disciples like this...

- He who was the Lord of glory—here to give His life for us—
 - at a time when we ought to have been ministering to Him...
 - We forsook Him...
 - What great things He suffered for us—what great things He suffered from us.
- Now the second aspect of Christ’s humiliation at His death...

II. Christ’s humiliation at death is seen in that He was officially condemned by the world.

READ> Mark 15:1-20

A. When we see that Pontius Pilate condemned him to be crucified, we need to see this as an official verdict...

1. What I mean is, Pilate was the one who at this time was the official ruler of God’s people—
 - The minister of God to speak for God in judicial matters...
 - The one who was to render judgements in God’s name.
 - This verdict, though unjust, was nevertheless in another sense a true verdict from the Lord...
 - because Jesus, as the one who was now bearing our sins, was charged for all of our sins...
 - As the one on whom our iniquities were laid, He was indeed guilty...
 - Guilty by voluntary association with us His people.
2. In condemning the Lord Jesus to be crucified,
 - Pilate represented the verdict of the Lord and of covenant people as a whole,

- making official the pronouncement of guilty that had already been rendered by the chief priests and scribes.

B. What a great humiliation this is!

1. The very thought that the Lord of Glory who made heaven and earth and who is the Son of God and the Judge of all the earth should allow Himself to be brought before men to be judged!
 - a. The very thought that He should allow them to make all sorts of false and unjust accusations against Him!
 - b. The very thought that He should put Himself under their authority and allow Himself to be condemned by them.
 - c. Who is this little governor—Pontius Pilate?
 - who are these chief priests and scribes to condemn the Lord of Glory?
 - to judge Him who is high above all human judgement!
2. Not only that,
 - But in all their proceedings they were very disrespectful of Him...
 - spitting upon him, striking him, mocking him.
 - Never was greater injustice done.
3. But perhaps worst of all was this...
 - a. That before the people Christ was presented as a blasphemer and as a wicked sinful man.
 - In all of His ministry, He sought nothing else but the Father's glory,
 - Yet now, He was presented before all the people as one who hated God—
 - as the worst of transgressors.
 - b. We cannot begin to understand what it must have been for him to be regarded in this way.

TRANS> And the Lord Jesus bore all of this humiliation for us.

III. Christ's humiliation at death is seen in that He was cursed by God the Father.

- For this I want to go to Psalm 22—
- Psalm 22 gives us the very thoughts of our Lord Jesus while He was on the cross...

- It is an amazing Psalm, written by prophecy a thousand years before Jesus suffered...
- We know for certain that this is about His sufferings because what is described here does not fit anyone else...
 - This is especially seen in the fact that the one who suffers these things cries out to God, is heard (v. 21), and answered,
 - and after He is answered,
 - The whole church (the OT assembly) is gathered to give thanks for it,
 - and the nations of the earth are joined with them to give thanks...
 - and the praise goes on from generation to generation!
 - This speaks of the acceptance of Christ's sacrifice for the salvation of the world.
 - It is God's acceptance of this sacrifice that brings salvation to all the earth and sets the earth to praising God.
 - And this Psalm even speaks of specifics that have to do with Christ's crucifixion...
 - The piercing of his hands and feet (v. 16)
 - The dividing of his garments, (v. 18)
 - His cry of "My God My God why have you forsaken me?" (v. 1)

And here in this Psalm we have a record of His very thoughts on the cross...

READ> Psalm 22:1-21

- Christian, see what great things our Redeemer suffered for us at His death?
- A. In the middle of the Psalm, He describes Himself as in the most extreme state of anguish.
- Look at Psalm 22:14-15:
 - **Psalm 22:14-15: "I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death."**
1. This is the language of extreme weakness, desperate exhaustion, and debility.
 - a. To be poured out like water is to feel your very life—your vitality—being poured out of you...
 - b. His bones were out of joint because after being nailed to the cross,

- the cross was raised up and dropped into a hole,
 - giving a terrible jolt that threw everything out of joint.
 - What pain must have been associated with this as he hung suspended between heaven and earth.
- c. For the heart to be like wax speaks of it being melted down...
- A melted heart is even worse than a broken heart—
 - When a thing is broken, it can be mended,
 - but when it is melted, it is beyond repair.
- d. He describes Himself as one whose strength is entirely spent.
- He is like a piece of broken pottery that can no longer hold His life inside of it.
 - Crucifixion kills by sheer exhaustion...
 - When the body is suspended by its arms, it is not possible to breathe adequately...
 - but just before the victim passes out,
 - the body automatically stiffens the legs, pushing against the nails by which the feet are held so that another breath can be taken.
 - and this goes on and on for hours and hours until at last the person is so worn out that he dies.
 - Just to make sure that the victim dies, the legs were ordinarily broken, making it impossible for them breathe.
 - Jesus was found to be already dead so his legs were not broken...but a spear was thrust in His side.
- e. Jesus, in this extreme condition, describes Himself as at the very point of death.
- He says that He is one brought to the dust of death!
 - What a humiliation this is for the one who made man out of the dust...
 - Now about to go to the grave where men's bodies return to dust.
 - Not that Jesus was to return to dust, but that He would indeed truly enter the grave where men do turn to dust.
2. The Son of God could never have experienced such humiliation as this if He had not taken to Himself a human body and soul.
- It is important for you to realise that the person who speaks here is indeed the very Son of God...

- He is the One who hung the stars in space and who upholds all things by the word of His power!
- Here He is, appearing in our flesh to suffer this unspeakable agony.

TRANS> In this Psalm, He also describes another aspect of His humiliation...perhaps the greatest...

B. He describes the shame He bore on the cross.

1. We don't always understand this very well in our society because we have no sense of honour.
 - And when there is no sense of honour, there is little sense of shame.
 - We do not value a good name the way we should.
 - We find it easier when no one worries about honour, and then we can live dishonourably without shame before each other...
 - It's sort of an unspoken, mutual agreement we have.
 - A man will leave his wife and children and bear no shame for it—and we like it that way...
 - A woman will lose her virginity, and bear not shame for that—and we like that too.
 - We know little about shame in our society because we are so godless.
 - As Jeremiah put it, we have forgotten how to blush.
 - But it will not always be so—
 - On the Day of Judgement, when we see the glory of God, then we will bear shame for what we have been before Him...
 - If you are outside Christ, you will be utterly terrified and feel the terrible weight of His judgement come upon you...
 - In that day, you will be deeply ashamed.
 - If you are in Christ, you will marvel that He should have shown mercy to you—such a sinner as you will see yourself to be!
 - Your gratitude will go off the charts!

TRANS> But understand that our Lord Jesus values honour—and despises shame...

- He was not at all like we are today.
- And on the cross, He bore public shame for our sins...

2. You can see in verse 6 that He describes Himself as a worm.

- And He is not speaking of an earthworm here either.
 - He is speaking of something more like a maggot...
 - those smelly, repulsive, little worms we start to find in our garbage bins as the weather gets warmer.
 - He says that He is no longer a man—that He is a reproach of men and despised by the people.
 - The verse goes on to explain how His enemies come around and mock Him as one who has been cursed of God...
 - They make faces at Him and tease Him for claiming that He was one who trusted in God...
 - “Where is your God now?” they say.
3. He describes these enemies as like bulls, raging lions, and dogs...
- a. He does not speak of just any bulls, but the bulls of Bashan, known for their size and strength.
 - Perhaps He compares His enemies to bulls because bulls are just plain mean—
 - they attack out of nothing but malice...
 - not because they are hungry or wrong has been done to them...
 - but simply because they are cantankerous.
 - b. But notice, our Lord also compares His enemies to lions...
 - Lions are known for the ferocity and for their appetite...
 - Our Lord’s enemies, you see, were mean like bulls, but they also had an appetite to devour the flesh of our Lord.
 - c. And then to complete the picture, the enemies are compared to dogs surrounding Him in a pack (v. 16)
 - This reminds us that our Lord’s enemies were organised and operated officially—
 - His reproach was increased because He was not killed by robbers and bandits, but by those who represented the Lord in their offices...
 - by the officers and rulers of the church and by the civil authorities who are servants of God sent forth to punish wickedness in His name.

TRANS> This is the wretched company of those who mocked Him and before whom He bore His shame.

C. But what is it that caused the mighty Lion of the Tribe of Judah to take these things so hard?

1. You may think me very callous for asking such a question...

- Surely anyone undergoing the dreadful agonies of crucifixion would have been in such anguish!
- But I want you to know that something much more was going on here.
- Our Lord's suffering went far beyond the physical suffering and the scoffing of men.

2. You see, when Jesus hung on that cross and the skies above Him were darkened, He was actually rejected by His Father.

a. His cry at the opening of this Psalm makes it clear that this is what happened to Him...

1) Look at verse 1! There He says:

- **Psalm 22:1: My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?**

- These words are recorded for us in the gospels as the very words that Jesus spoke from the cross...

- And you can be sure that Jesus is not exaggerating here—

- He is not complaining about something that did not actually happen.

- During the time of darkness while He was on the cross,

- God the Father rejected God the Son!

2) See how our Lord elaborates on this rejection as verse 1 continues...

- **Psalm 22:1-2: Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent.**

b. You need to understand that when Jesus went to the cross, He bore the sins of all His people!

1) He bore the shame of them all before the Father!

- As the prophet Isaiah says, "all of our iniquities were laid on Him"

- "For the transgression of My people was He stricken."

- He was dealt with as though He had committed all the sins that we His people have committed.

- He bore the pains of Hell for us!

- 2) Now think what it was for Him to appear before the Father with our sins charged to Him!
- a) It was far worse than we can understand and that for two reasons...
- Because we don't even come close to loving the Father the way He does,
 - Nor do begin to hate sin as He hates it...
 - I mean look at us—we still commit sin!
 - He always—from all eternity—did only what pleased the Father.
 - He lives to please His Father—that is the Son's delight.
 - And the Father has always been pleased and has always given all things to the Son.
 - There is this perfect, unbroken communion from all eternity.
- b) Jesus already had a full understanding of the glory of God that I told you we will understand on the Day of Judgement.
- And it was before this glorious one that He was presented with all our sins...
 - bearing the guilt of them and the shame of them as if He had committed them all...
 - He who hated sin so much that He would never even think of committing it became the chief of sinners!
- c) The very words of the scoffers in a certain twisted way were true...
- They cut all the more deeply because they were true...
 - He was despised and rejected by the Father.
 - His communion with the Father was broken.
 - THIS was His anguish on the cross!
 - THIS was equal to an eternity in Hell for us!
- 3) I don't mean to suggest that His physical sufferings were not intimately connected with the suffering of the Father's rejection...
- They were...
 - They were all the more unbearable because they were a true expression of the wrath of the Father He so loved.
 - But the depth of agony was the Father's rejection.

TRANS> What agony your dear Lord bore for you, Christian!

- You understand why He did this, don't you?
 - He bore the punishment of our sins so that we could be forgiven!
 - He suffered the pains of Hell for us!
- What amazing love! What suffering your Lord bore for you!