

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 6

Halifax, 26 August 2007

Q. 5 What do the scriptures make known of God?

A. The scriptures make known what God is, the persons in the Godhead, His decrees, and the execution of His decrees.

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 9:1-26.

Introduction:

In our scripture reading tonight, you can see that God was going to humble His people by bringing judgement upon them.

- Over the years, God had blessed them, and they had become proud and self sufficient,
 - very much like the nations of the west who have so enjoyed the grace of God over several centuries.
 - His grace brought prosperity, and they allowed their prosperity to puff them up.
- And so it is, that, in the face of coming judgement,
 - The LORD calls them to stop glorying in themselves and to start glorying in Him—
 - and in particular in *knowing* Him.
 - They were going to go through some very hard times under His chastisement,
 - but these times would be profitable for them **if** they learned of God through them.

I. Truly, knowing God is what you should glory in.

A. I would draw your attention in particular to Jer. 9:23-24 which says:

- **Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty *man* glory in his might, nor let the rich *man* glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I *am* the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the LORD.**
- 1. Oh how easily satisfied we are with knowing other things—lesser things than God!
 - a. Do you see the wise man?

- How impressed we are with him!
 - Look at the books he has written, look at the languages he knows!
 - He seems to know everything...
- But does he?
 - Ask him for a cure for cancer...
 - Let him tell you how to prevent death...
 - Let him bring together nations that are at enmity—

b. Do you see the mighty man?

- There is Nebuchadnezzar!
 - He has conquered nations—he can command the death of his wise men—
 - He has authority to do whatever he wishes...
- But let's see him command the sun to stand still.
 - Let's see him command the rain to water the earth or the tide to stay back.
 - There was a king—I can't remember which one—whose servants praised him too highly and said he could do anything,
 - so he took his seat out on the beach and commanded the tide to stay back in order that he might show them that he was quite limited in power.

c. Do you see the rich man?

- How impressed we are with the riches of Bill Gates...
 - He can buy whatever he wants...
 - or can he?
- No, I tell you,
 - he can't even buy the very basic necessities...
 - He has nothing in his treasury to purchase the salvation of his soul.
 - He is a pauper just like the rest of us.

2. The Lord tells us not to glory in these things.

- a. He is telling them not to glory in them because His judgement is coming,
 - 1) And when it does,

- The self-sufficient wise man will be a fool...
 - all his counsel will be lost...
 - The self-sufficient mighty man will be weak...
 - he will be helpless to defend his people—perhaps even dead on the battlefield...
 - The self-sufficient rich man will be poor...
 - all his riches will go to another.
- 2) One of the very reasons God sends us trials is to show us how weak and vain all the things we have been trusting really are...
- He shows us clearly that they are but gifts and creatures and cannot themselves sustain us.
 - This is why tribulation is so good for us...
 - It weans us from all of the empty things we trust in.
 - By having them taken from us,
 - we end up with no place to go but to the Lord...
 - And then we realize that all these things we have trusted in have no glory beyond the glory that God gives them...
 - They do not have an independent power to bless or curse,
 - they only bless or curse as God makes use of them to bless or curse.
- b. Interestingly, Romans 5 tells us to glory in tribulations...
- It tells us that tribulation works patience in us—we learn to go on without the comforts that the trial has taken away...
 - And it develops our character—we are shown to others to have our happiness in God (which happiness we are actually discovering all the more by having the comforts taken away)...
 - And this produces hope—we begin to look for what God has promised instead of at what we have now...we realize how little we had, even when we had great riches or something that we put a lot of confidence in...
 - And this causes us to understand the love of God in a way that we had never understood it before...
 - When God takes the things we have been glorying in,
 - our first response is to question His goodness and love...
 - But if we are His, we begin to seek Him, to look for the evidence of His love...

- And soon we come to see that His love is demonstrated in the cross of Jesus Christ...
 - and then we glory in the cross and in the love of God in a much richer way than we ever did before the trial removed all the things we had gloried in...
- c. So the message of the LORD in Jeremiah is a message of preparation for the coming judgement...
- God is getting ready to take away the things they have been glorying in...
 - so the best way to prepare for this judgement is to stop glorying in these things *before* they are taken away...
 - and glory in the LORD instead.
 - Then when they are taken away,
 - It won't matter so much to you because you will still be able to glory in the LORD...
 - In fact, you will be able to glory even in the tribulation because you see God's hand in it...
 - You will see that the judgement itself is His work...
 - and you will learn of Him.
 - The Lord is telling us, then, not to trust in these, wisdom, might, or riches for our own good—He is being kind to us—
 - He is warning us that He might rescue us from trusting in what cannot help us in the end...

B. So what does the LORD tell us to glory in?

1. In knowing Him!

- There is no better knowledge than this because He is the LORD.

2. This is the name Yahweh or Jehovah...

a. This is the name by which God is made known to us in Exodus 3:14:

- **Exodus 3:13-14: 13 Then Moses said to God, "Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"**

- This name means "I am who I am."

b. It speaks of God as the one who simply is—

- He is the being who is uncreated—
 - in a whole different dimension than we are.
 - He is self-existing and complete in Himself, standing in need of nothing that He has made.
3. How foolish it is—how rebellious it is—for us to overlook what God reveals about Himself and to glory in what He has made.
- The Bible is constantly teaching us this simple lesson—that God is the LORD.
 - That it is because of Him that we have what we have.
 - That nothing created has power to bless or to curse us, as we so often suppose...
 - that it is only as He, who is LORD, makes these things a blessing or curse to us that they will be so.
 - We are so foolish to glory in the creature when we have a Creator.

TRANS> We are to know Him them,

- not just in an abstract way as the self-existing one...
 - but as the self-existing One—the LORD—who has a plan and who executes His plan in the earth...
 - The Bible continually teaches us, as it does here in Jeremiah,

II. That He is the One who has decreed all things and who carries out His decree in the world.

A. In Jeremiah 9:24, He not only declares that He is LORD, but that He is:

- “The LORD who is exercising lovingkindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth.”
 - In other words, He is carrying out His plan—He is executing His decree.
1. He is declaring this in Jeremiah because He is getting ready to act...
- In verse 25-26,
 - He tells Israel that He is going to deal with them as if they are uncircumcised.
 - He is going to do this because even though they are circumcised physically according to the tradition of their fathers,
 - they are not circumcised in heart...
 - They are not born again—

- They do not have a new heart that glories in God, that trusts in Him.
 - Instead they are trusting in their own wisdom and power and wealth.
- The LORD is telling them that He is going to deal with them the same way He dealt with the Canaanites before them when He drove them out of the Land.
 - This is the way it will be in the final day of judgement as well...
 - It won't matter if you have the covenant sign of belonging to God—
 - circumcision in the OT and baptism in the NT...
 - If you are not born again—if your heart is not cleansed—
 - you will be judged with the unbelievers because you are an unbeliever...
- But in one way, God is dealing with His people in a very different way than He dealt with the Canaanites in this judgement...
 - Yes, he is going to drive them out of the Promised Land,
 - but the great difference is that Jeremiah is telling them ahead of time that this is what the LORD will do...
 - And his prophecy through Jeremiah is full of promises for restoration.
 - God is telling them through Jeremiah, repeatedly—that He is going to take away all that they are glorying in...
 - so that they might know Him again...
 - He is calling them to know Him whom they have forsaken...
 - He is calling them to be born again.
 - He is showing that their expulsion from the Land is His doing as the LORD.
 - He is making it clear that what is about to happen to them is the outworking of His decree—
 - it is not something that just happened!
 - He is showing them that He is LORD who executes His decrees in the earth...
 - That all that happens here is because of Him.

2. This is a lesson that is clearly taught throughout the scripture...

- But it is a very difficult one to get hold of.

- God is forever telling us, as we saw this morning, that our destiny is in His hands and that we need to see that He is LORD,
 - but we keep thinking our destiny is in the hands of our own wisdom and our own might and our own wealth...
 - or in the wisdom and power and wealth of those around us.
 - We either trust in what we have, or in the wisdom, might, and wealth that others have—
- We look at the Egyptians or the Assyrians or the Muslims or Wall Street, or the University and we think they will determine our destiny...
 - but they will not—
 - God is the One who will carry out His plan...
 - He is the One who exercises lovingkindness, judgement, and righteousness.
 - It is His favour that we need to be concerned about, not our own wisdom, strength, or wealth, or that of the world...
 - God is the one who will give these things and take them away,
 - and it is Him that we are to glory in knowing.
 - It is in Him alone that we will find solid and lasting joy forever.
 - He is the one to be feared.

B. Well then, let us look at these three things that God delights in doing in the earth...

1. First, He delights in exercising lovingkindness.

- a. This is a huge topic that we will devote a lot of time and attention to in the Catechism as we move along...
 - It is the word 'hesed' which speaks of God's covenant love—His steadfast promised love...
 - It is exercised upon sinners to whom God shows mercy...
- b. In the exercise of this covenant love,
 - God came to Abraham and established His covenant with him, promising to be his God and to make him one of His people...
 - This meant a lot!
 - It meant that God was going to adopt a whole great company of fallen sinners upon whom He would bring His eternal salvation—

- For them, He would do all that was necessary to make them holy and without blame before Him.
- It was a huge commitment of amazing grace and mercy.
- He had purposed to bring His people out of Egypt and establish them in the promised hope of Christ...
 - To give them ceremonies of worship and to give them a city where He would reveal Himself to them as their Father who justified them...
 - To give them priests and prophets to represent Him and to show them His acceptance of them and to keep them looking to Him for His promise...
 - It meant that He would chastise them when they went astray in order to preserve them until Jesus came.
 - You see, this was not about what they were going to do,
 - It was not about their wisdom or might or power...
 - It was about what He was going to do...
 - **He** exercises lovingkindness—fulfills His covenant promise of grace—and it is for us to trust Him...
 - That is what the scriptures continually call us to do...
 - God has the plan and He is carrying it out—we are to trust Him and look to Him...
- But God’s covenant promise—His exercising of lovingkindness meant more than this...
 - It also meant that He would send Jesus Christ to redeem us...
 - The New Testament unfolds for us how God exercised lovingkindness for us through Jesus Christ...
 - How He came down from heaven and was conceived in the womb of a virgin that He might partake of our nature...
 - How He was anointed by the Holy Spirit to be the Messiah—
 - our prophet to show us the truth
 - our priest to offer Himself up for our sins and to intercede for us...
 - and our king to rule over us and to destroy all our enemies.
 - We are taught how God works our complete salvation through Christ by His Spirit...
 - Justifying us, sanctifying us, and at last raising us up to live in glory.

- God delights in doing this...
 - He delights in exercising lovingkindness in the earth!
 - And we are to glory in knowing Him as the One who does all this...
 - We are to praise Him for His great work as we saw this morning!
 - We are to study it and to find our delight in it.

2. Second, there is judgement—He tells us that He exercises judgement!

a. And indeed He does...

1) Judgement refers to His rule...

- He is the One who raises up kings and who puts down kings from their seats...
- They do not rule unless He raises them up,
 - and they cease to rule as soon as He puts them down.
- This is the lesson that Nebuchadnezzar learned after God humbled him and took away His glory...
 - **Daniel 4:34: And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, “What have You done?”**
 - Nebuchadnezzar came to see that God is the LORD.

2) The word judgment that is used in Jeremiah includes, but is not limited to what we call judgement.

- It speaks to everything that pertains to ruling and governing.
- The idea is that God exercises judgement—that what we see is the exercise of His rule.

b. We see God bringing His judgement against Egypt in the book of Exodus in order to show both the Egyptians and the Israelites that He is LORD.

- Have you ever noticed how He keeps on saying that He is sending Moses and sending the plagues in order to show that He is LORD?
 - He wants to make it clear that He is the One who rules—that He is the judge of all and that no king rules but by His hand...

- Thus He strengthens Pharaoh to fight with all his might and then humbles him so that he is forced to give in and let the people go.
- This is the LORD delighting to exercise His judgement in the earth...
 - He announces, and then brings His judgement upon Egypt, the Amalakites, the Canaanites, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans...
 - Over and over He brings down the mighty to show that He is the LORD who exercises judgement according to His plan which no man can alter.
 - And now in Jeremiah, He is announcing the judgement that is going to come on Israel...
 - He wants them to know where it came from.
 - He has revealed Himself as judge and He wants us, His people, to know Him and trust Him as the ruler of all the world...
 - We are to fear nothing because Jehovah, the self existing One, is our God and He is carrying out His plan...a plan which no one can stop.
- c. But we look out and we see the cruel Assyrians who murder His people,
 - who destroy and burn and who skin kings alive...
 - who blaspheme the true God.
 - If God delights in exercising judgement,
 - why do such persons rise to power?
 - What kind of rule is this?
 - And if He delights to govern,
 - why are there droughts that last for three years, and seven year famines?
 - Why is righteous David chased around by Saul for years and years?
 - Why does righteous Job have so many calamities fall upon him?
 - Why do children of believers die before they are even born?
 - Why do you have so many pressures and stresses and sorrows brought upon you?
 - Where is the LORD in all this if He really does delight to exercise judgement?
 - Why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer?

- I'll tell you why...
 - It's because the LORD delights in judgement...
 - He deals with us first as the household of faith...
 - As we have seen, He often has to humble us because of our pride—because we forget that He is LORD!
 - And so He sends His judgements upon us to humble us.
 - As we have seen, He announces them and then He sends them so that we will know that they are all from Him...
 - And of course now that we have the scriptures which show us that all that happens is the exercise of God's judgement,
 - we need to apply to everything—to see His hand in all that befalls us as the one who rules over all—
 - who raises up kings and who destroys kings according to His purposes.
 - It is not for us to try to rule—to be the judge...
 - It is for us to trust God in His judgements and to know that though we may be called to suffer,
 - it is only that we might know Him better and give glory to Him.
3. Third, there is righteousness. The LORD delights in exercising righteousness.
- a. This probably speaks more about *how* He exercises His lovingkindness and judgement...
 - He always does it in a way that comports with His righteousness...
 - As we saw this morning, He is always consistent with Himself—true to His own righteous and perfect nature...
 - He never does anything that is “out of line” or that “cuts corners.”
 - Everything He does is done in perfect righteousness...
 - in perfect correspondence with who He is and what He is.
 - b. And so when we look at lovingkindness,
 - righteousness means that in showing mercy, He does it in such a way that His perfect justice is not violated—
 - He shows mercy in a way that is consistent with His own character and being, with His own will and perfections.
 - That is why the exercise of lovingkindness was so complicated...

- It involved adopting those who were fit only for the fires of Hell...
 - It involves sending Christ to meet each and every demand of God's justice for our redemption...
 - It involves a full payment so that God might say that ungodly persons were righteous and not be telling a lie!
 - He made this glorious declaration in a way that did not violate His justice.
- c. And likewise, when we look at judgement,
- We see that God exercises it in a way that comports with His true nature as well...
 - When He raises up kings and puts down kings,
 - He always acts in a way that is true to His nature...
 - He never punishes one who is not a sinner, and He never punishes any sinner more than that sinner deserves.
 - His judgement is all done in perfect righteousness—in perfect conformity to His own character and truth.
 - You will say, but what about Christ...
 - How could it be righteous for Him to be cursed and crucified when He had no sin?
 - And I answer—it is because He did have sin...
 - not His own sin, but our sin which He voluntarily took responsibility for...
 - It was righteous for Jesus to suffer because He suffered for our sin.
 - It is not unrighteous for one man to pay the debt of another man,
 - nor is unrighteous for the creditor to receive payment from another man.
 - So it is that God was pleased to bruise Jesus because He was paying our debt of sin...
 - But after He had paid the full penalty, it was also righteous for God to raise Him up from the dead.
 - It would have been unjust for Him to leave Him unpunished when He taken our sins upon Him...
 - and it would have been unjust for the LORD to leave Him in the grave when He had completed the sentence of punishment.

- God does all that He does in perfect righteousness...
 - Never once does He deviate from what is right and true, from what is in perfect conformity to His own unchanging perfect nature.
 - It is not for us to question Him.
 - In our text, the Lord was getting ready to judge Israel.
 - Ultimately, He was doing it for their salvation—exercising lovingkindness to restore them to His way...
 - but a nasty judgement was necessary...
 - and it would fall upon them in perfect righteousness.
 - God would act in a way that was true to Himself.

Conclusion

- And so you see that the Bible teaches us who God is so that we might know Him, it teaches us about His decrees—that He is the One with the plan, and it teaches us about the execution of His decrees...
 - how He carries out His work in the earth.
- Do not foolishly suppose that wisdom, power and wealth themselves can give you happiness...
 - It is not for you to glory in these gifts, but rather in the LORD who gives them to you and who alone gives you happiness in possessing them.
 - We must not suppose the power to bless is in these things...
 - They cannot bless at all unless the LORD makes them a blessing...
 - It is He, not wisdom, power and wealth, that is LORD.