

THE DEATH OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

Rev. H. Hofman sr. - Lord's Day 16, Question 40

Psalter 121

Scripture: Isaiah 53

Psalter 77

Psalter 149

Psalter 50

Dear congregation, we ask your attention for Lord's Day 16 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 40:

Question 40: Why was it necessary for Christ to humble Himself even unto death?

Answer: Because with respect to the justice and truth of God, satisfaction for our sins could be made no otherwise, than by the death of the Son of God.

We wish to consider:

The Death of the Lord Jesus Christ

1. The Necessity of Christ's Death
2. The Satisfaction of Christ's Death
3. The Effects of Christ's Death

I repeat: The Death of the Lord Jesus Christ: First, The Necessity of Christ's Death; secondly, The Satisfaction of Christ's Death; and thirdly, The Effects of Christ's Death.

The Catechism now comes to the fourth step of Christ's humiliation, namely His death, to which Christ readily submitted. That only Name given among men must be proclaimed in all its depth and in the glory of His work. We read in Scripture that Jesus Christ loved His people to the very end. This is the foundation of the church of Christ. He was obedient to the death of the cross. He cheerfully endured all the sufferings for the sake of His people. We always have to look at Jesus Christ in this deep way, as the great Substitute, as the Mediator, and as the only Redeemer.

Behind Him is the hand of the Father. That is what the instructor tells us today: "Because with respect to the justice and truth of God, satisfaction for our sins could be made no otherwise, than by the death of the Son of God." Indeed, we see Christ's love, His glory, His faithfulness, and His willingness, that He cheerfully endured all the sufferings. But behind all these things was the hand of God the Father. First of all, it was His Father's will and pleasure. No, Christ was not rebellious, neither did He turn away His back from the smiters, nor His face from shame and spitting. When the time was come to suffer in the stead of His people, according to the counsel of God and His own agreement--and that always goes together; we can never separate these things--God's counsel, God's holy will, God's justice and truth, but also Christ's own agreement--He was like the innocent sheep. "So He openeth not His mouth," as we heard out of Isaiah 53. He said not one word against the sentence of death being executed on Him. He was not reluctant to become a sacrifice for the sins of His people. He readily and voluntarily obeyed God's holy will, but it was also Christ's will. That He readily and voluntarily obeyed God's will belongs together. This is called Christ's passive obedience. We read in John 10:18, "No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself."

Thus in the fortieth answer of the Catechism, the absolute necessity of His death is particularly addressed here, for the Catechism asks, "Why was it necessary for Christ to humble Himself even unto death?" It was necessary because of God's truth and righteousness. Sin could not be paid for in any other manner than by the death of the Son of God. The death of Christ has everything to do with the cost, with the price of deliverance. Sometimes in our daily life a set price for something can be reduced somewhat, but it is not so with the price of our sins and guilt. That can never be reduced. Neither was it so with Jesus paying for our sins. That cost cannot be reduced. It must be paid in full. Behind it is God's justice and truth. That is the unchangeable God. He said to Adam, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Here is the Substitute, and all the requirements are brought upon Him, also in this respect. God's truth shall stand forever. God's truth demands full satisfaction--not as much as possible or as much as we can bear or handle--but God's truth demands full satisfaction.

Think about this, congregation. We often speak lightly about grace and forgiveness, about sin and transgressions, and about God's grace and mercy, as if the cost is very low. And certainly, God is gracious, and He is ready and willing to

forgive all our sins. There is no end to it. The grace of God, His mercy, His goodness, and His kindness, is forever. We read in the Psalms so many times of God's mercy and His grace, especially in Psalm 103: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; ... who redeemeth thy life from destruction ... The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy ... He hath not dealt with us after our sins." Then we hear the saints of old rejoice in the mercy and grace of God, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us." We can never say too much of His goodness and love. We can never go too deeply into the ocean of grace and mercy, but let us never forget that the Lord is also righteous and true. Let us never pass over the cost in order that grace and mercy might be received in our hearts. His grace and mercy will never be displayed at the cost of His justice. That is what the instructor teaches us today. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Man has eaten from the tree. He broke the terms of the covenant of works. There we became lost, the way to heaven was closed from our side forever and ever, and since the fall in Paradise, sin and guilt is piled up. We have said already that the grace of God is as far as the east is from the west, but we also must say that our sins are so many, as far as the east is from the west.

And now there is no way of forgiveness but through the way of full satisfaction. We heard already in the first part of the Catechism that God's holy justice requires full satisfaction from the sinner. The punishment for sin cannot be carried out but by full atonement. That is necessary to learn, also experimentally. We must know in our hearts how great our sins and misery are. At the beginning of the Catechism we considered that payment for sin must be made either by us or by another. And here is the Other. Every person lies under God's righteous judgment. The wrath of God is upon us. The curse of the law is upon us. We are dead in trespasses and sin. That is the threefold death, death in its full extent. It must come back also in the instruction of the Catechism. This threefold death is temporal, spiritual, and eternal death. Death means that communion with God is broken, that the only source of life, God, is departed from us, and we departed from Him. We have lost the image of God and the true knowledge of God. That is death. Oh, you have heard it every Sunday and you can read in God's Word what our condition is since the fall in Paradise.

Such a death is not first realized when we die the temporal death. No, we are born outside of the kingdom of God and are dead in trespasses and sin, without God and Christ and without hope in the world. This judgment has been fully executed. Sin and punishment, the wrath of God, and the curse of God's law are reality. They rest upon us. We carry death within us. God's wrath and the curse of the law are upon us as long as we are unconverted. Oh, what an awful truth! Surely we are all aware of temporal death. We see it time and time again, and we know that we carry death within us. Who is not on his way to the grave? "What man is he that liveth and shall not see death?" We all know it, believe it, and see it around us. Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Many tender blood ties are severed by death. Again, death is reality. God does not overlook sin. How serious life is, and how serious it is to be a human being.

But, congregation, who knows his spiritual death? Is not this subject frequently a cause of offence? Who fully knows his spiritual depravity? Be honest with your own soul. That we must die, we can see and believe. In every city or village there is a cemetery, and we see that "man goeth to his long home." We are all realistic and know that we must die. But who believes his spiritual death? Do you know it by experience, by the light of the Holy Spirit, that our life is under the curse of God as long as we are unconverted? Do you know, experience, and feel your spiritual death? In all seriousness the Pharisees asked Jesus, "Are we then also blind?" Jesus had told them, as it were, "You are blind leaders," and they did not believe it. They did not know their own hearts. Jesus told them, with other words, "You are spiritually dead. Even if you keep the law perfectly, even if you live a decent life and pray on every corner of the street, you are blind." But they did not believe it. They couldn't see it. They could not accept that they also were blind.

Modern and humanistic Christianity does not want to hear that the entire human race is cursed in the sight of God. One aspect of that spiritual death is our inability to do any good. This stirs up enmity in our heart, or we make a sandy ground of it, a wall behind which we try to hide ourselves and in the meantime blame God for our sin. Eternal darkness is the future expectation of an unsaved soul. How necessary it is to bring it again to the foreground. As the Catechism comes to the point of the necessity of the death of Christ, then it is for this reason: that Jesus Christ is the Substitute, the Mediator. "Because with respect to the justice and truth of God, satisfaction for our sins could be made no

otherwise, than by the death of the Son of God." We cannot speak, preach, read, or meditate on the death of Christ without speaking about our death. It is necessary to know that and to realize in what condition we are, so that we may see the dark background of our life, our hopelessness, and our foolishness, may know that death is now reality, that we carry it within us, and must be delivered from it. That is possible if the Holy Spirit comes in our life and takes away our stony heart and gives us a heart of flesh. Then we know something about our spiritual death. Then we know and feel something of our empty hearts and life, and we experience something of the wrath of God, and the righteous justice and truth of God.

If we hear, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," we can think about Adam and Eve, that they transgressed God's law and sinned against God, but if the Holy Spirit comes into the heart of a sinner and gives light within us, then it is not Adam, but then it is, "In the day that *thou* eatest thereof." Then it becomes so personal. Then *I* have done that which is evil in God's sight, and *I* am the sinner on the way to eternal darkness. Then *I* am that sinner under the curse of the law, and I feel the wrath of God lying upon me. When I read God's Word, where it says in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death," I cannot deny that I am a sinner, I cannot hide myself before the Lord, because the light shines into the darkness of my heart. Then it becomes true that while I commit sin, I am dead in trespasses and sin. We read in Romans 1:32, "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death." And that is I.

Christ voluntarily submitted Himself to God's holy will. We may see that from the beginning to the end of His life, the whole life of Christ from the cradle to the cross, was suffering. He was, so to speak, dying every day. All His sufferings were preparations for His death. Christ was put to death in the flesh, in our human flesh. That is why He became Man, as we have heard, being born of the Virgin Mary.

This is the way of God's salvation, and He has made this way known to sinful, lost people. He came in our human flesh. It is such a comfort to know that. It comes so close to His substitutionary work. Christ was put to death in the flesh, as we read in 1 Peter 3:18: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh." This is also connected with God's justice and truth, because man has sinned, and

God is so just and true that He punished man, the same nature which has committed sin. It is such a great comfort that He is made of our flesh and blood. That Christ suffered death, that He was put to death in the flesh, is because of God's justice and truth.

Only His body suffered this death, not His soul. His soul did not die, but was commended into the hands of His Father. Even His divine nature was not capable of suffering death, and yet the body of Christ suffered death in union with His divine Person. Hence the Lord of glory is said to be crucified. Those two things belong together. It is one Person, and two natures. The divine nature could not suffer, but His human nature was put to death, but in one Person. Thus salvation, the Substitute, is a gift of God, the work of God, as we read in God's Word, "they have crucified the Lord of glory." His divine nature sustained His human nature, so that He could go through this deep way, through the fire of God's anger, through the deep waters of God's wrath. He was put to death. This is the way of God's justice and truth. He, as the Substitute, has purchased His church, as it says in God's Word, "with His blood."

Thus the death of Christ was real. He was not taken from the cross alive. That the death of Christ was real is evident from what we read, that He gave up the ghost. His death was voluntary. He lay His life down of Himself, and gave Himself freely, to be a sacrifice. Oh congregation, here we are standing at the ocean of His love. He loved His church to the end. He has brought full satisfaction. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross. On the background of all His suffering and death, there is God's justice and truth. Then we must go back to the eternal decrees and purpose of God, which are the foundation, the source and spring, of salvation. In the Counsel of Peace, it pleased the Lord to open this way. In Psalm 85 and Psalm 40 we read that Jesus Christ gave Himself to be the Servant of the Lord. "Lo, I come: ... I delight to do Thy will, O My God," and that from all eternity.

What a firm foundation the church of Christ has. It originates from all eternity. It is by the foreknowledge of God that Christ was delivered into the hands of murderers. Herod, Pilate, Judas, and Caiaphas did no other things against Him than that which the counsel of God had determined before was to be done. Everything--Jesus' coming in the flesh, and everything that happened from the cradle to the cross--was according to God's holy will. Every step He took,

every word He spoke, even all that the enemies did to Him--Herod, Pilate, Caiaphas, the soldiers, and the Jews--were all according to His will.

What a precious love Christ showed in His life here upon earth. Without all that God has done and the will of God, nothing could have been done with Jesus. Jesus said to Pilate, "Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above." Isaiah says, "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief." God awoke the sword of justice against Christ. God, the Scripture says, has not spared His own Son, but has delivered Him up for us all. The moving cause of all this was the great love He bore to His chosen ones in Christ. In the covenant of grace, the death of Christ was the foundation. His suffering and death, His sacrifice, was formed upon Christ's obedience unto death. He was willing to fulfil all the requirements. "I delight to do Thy will, O My God." What moved Him thereto was His free love to all who are given to Him, as it says in Hebrews 12, that Jesus, "for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame." It was necessary that Christ died, because there was no other way. It was God's way. God will have His justice satisfied. It cannot be otherwise. God says, "It must be so. This is the only way. This is the only possibility." God's way to be saved is through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Do we know by experience, congregation, the necessity of Christ's death? Who is Christ for you? We talk about Him, we hear about Him, and we use that Name so often--Jesus Christ our Lord. But do you need Him because of your lost condition? What must you do with Jesus? By nature, we would like to run away from God and try to help ourselves. If we are honest with ourselves, we always try to climb up to God in the way of the broken covenant of works, or to hide ourselves behind the stony wall of our incapability, then secretly to blame God that we have a stony heart. We are on the way of self-righteousness and seek to save ourselves with our doings. Oh congregation, it does not work. We are deceiving ourselves. We know nothing about Christ if we are working on our own salvation or hiding ourselves behind the stony wall of our incapability. If we know something of God's justice and truth, if we know something of our lost condition, and if we know something of the wrath of God and the curse of the law, then we have to learn that we cannot help ourselves, and that the garment of self-righteousness is nothing but filthy rags. Do we know and experience the necessity of Christ's death?

Let us first sing from Psalter 149, all stanzas.

Why is it necessary to pause at Christ's death? If the Holy Spirit comes in our heart, then God takes hold of us. Then hell and damnation are upon us and set before us. Then all our efforts fail to satisfy God's justice. Then "the cords of death held me in deep despair," David says in Psalm 116. "The pangs of hell, like waves by tempest driven, rolled o'er my soul." Then we know something of what Hebrews 12 says, "Our God is a consuming fire." "The wages of sin is death." Then God's judgment affects us. It becomes personal. We must die and we cannot die. God must punish me. Then we expect to be lost forever. Our tears, our righteousnesses, our reformation, our good works, our best works, cannot help us. We must die. That is the end of all our doings, the end of all our works.

Listen carefully to how the instructor teaches us: "Satisfaction for our sins could be made no otherwise, than by the death of the Son of God." Do we hear it? Do we realize in what dangerous ways we are going if we are trying to satisfy for our sins, to pay the Lord for our sins? Then we are deceiving ourselves. Hear again, fellow traveller to eternity, we carry death within us, and always, every day, we are on the edge of our life. Every step can be the last step, but "satisfaction for our sins could be made no otherwise, than by the death of the Son of God." Have you ever been on Golgotha? Have you ever by faith seen the body of Christ when His head hung on His breast after He had died? Have you ever felt the necessity to know Him as the crucified Christ? "Satisfaction for our sins could be made no otherwise, than by the death of the Son of God."

"No otherwise." Whatever other way you think is a wrong way. Whatever different way you are going other than this only way, you deceive yourself. There is not one different way to go. We must know Christ, the dying Christ, who gave His life. We must transfer our sins upon His shoulders.

There are many who do have a different way, but they are deceiving themselves. They are building their house of salvation on sandy ground. There are people who secretly think in their own heart that they can have a good hope without Christ, who think or expect to be saved without knowing and without being united with Christ. And that is impossible. Only those who are in Christ are new creatures. We must know Him.

Dear congregation, I cannot let you go without this deep and serious warning: Satisfaction for your sins can be made no otherwise, than by the death of Christ. Isaiah says that there are people who spend money for that which is

not bread, and their labor for that which satisfieth not. There are people who are always trying to make themselves better. They spend their whole life in the workhouse. They are always at work, trying to improve themselves, praying more, and trying to cover their nakedness with the filthy rags of their own works. And, congregation, it does not and cannot work. There is no other way. I know this is sharp. This is the sharp sword of God's Word, but it is also of deep comfort. I hope that also here there are many who know it by experience that their ways are dead-end roads, who know by experience that all their best works became filthy rags, who know by experience that they cannot meet God with their own works, and have become lost, naked sinners. If we are stripped of all our righteousnesses and become a naked sinner in the presence of the righteous, just, and true God, then we must die. And what a wonder, if being at the gates of eternity, at the gates of dark, dark hell, we then may hear of that Substitute, if we may climb the hill of Golgotha and hear His words, "It is finished." What a wonder to hear that it is all done, that He has paid to the full, that He has brought full satisfaction, that He is that great Substitute, that Christ Jesus dying on the cross has satisfied God's truth and justice. Then we see that all our works have been in vain and that only His mediatorial work is the foundation of my salvation. Then I may hear with the ears of faith, that mercy and truth are met together--not with my tears and experiences, not with my best and good works, but that they have met together--that righteousness and peace have kissed each other. "Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven."

With the death of Christ satisfaction is brought for sin, full satisfaction. Let us never try to pay or to bring satisfaction for our sins. Do you know what is necessary?--unity with Christ. He is the only source of life. He is the Life. Not our works, not our tears, not our righteousnesses, but unity, communion with Christ, by faith, is necessary. Oh, that His work, His Name, is the main point, the main Person in the preaching. We heard the last time that the death and the suffering of Christ is called the preaching of the cross, the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is necessary for all of us to hear time and time again of His love, of His great work which He has accomplished to the end, to hear of God's decree, of that Counsel of Peace, and that God is satisfied from all eternity. That is why His name is called Christ, the Servant of God. God was satisfied with the death of His Son. It was enough for Christ, when He cried out with a loud voice, "It is finished." It was enough for the Father. His justice and truth were satisfied. It was heard

here upon earth, "It is enough. It is finished." It was heard in heaven and accepted, "It is enough."

But, congregation, what about us? Is it enough for you? Have you heard it, when you were burdened with your sins, when you were lost, and stripped of everything? Have you heard those words of Christ, "It is finished," and that the arms of faith embraced this dying Christ, so that you could say, "It is enough for me"?

Then death is taken away. We hope to hear more of that in the future, when the Catechism asks, "Since then Christ died for us, why must we also die?" Death is taken away. The power of death is gone, and we live in Christ. Our body must die. We must die the temporal death, but it is a going into eternal life.

Congregation, be honest. You need this finished work of Christ. The word "satisfaction" means "enough". Take it along with you; meditate upon it. He went through death. The requirements of God's justice and truth never came again. Old and young, is it "enough" for you? Are you still working, are you still trying to bring something or to add something? Then you have never heard, "It is enough." If you are trying or thinking secretly that something from you is necessary, if you are still working to bring some conditions from your side, then you have never felt or seen your incapability, then you have never come to the bottom of your lost condition. Then you always find something in yourself. The satisfaction of Christ takes away everything of our doing. It is one of the two-- either Christ paid to the full; or, nothing is paid. You need a full Christ. You need the full satisfaction of Christ, not a part from Christ and a part from you--not one tear, not one sigh, not one prayer, not one good work--it is all nothing in the balance of God's justice. You need full satisfaction. It is such a wonder and such a deep experience to lay the hand of faith on the dying Christ. He died for me-- enough for me. That is salvation. Then there is peace with God. Then the lost son comes home.

Amen.

Psalter 50: all stanzas