

## Suffered and Was Crucified

Isaiah 53:3-12

Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 37-39

*Studies in the Heidelberg Catechism #20*

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**G**OD has spoken to us tonight in his Word about his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's respond in confession using the words of

Heidelberg Catechism questions and answers 37-39:

Q.37. What do you understand by the word "suffered"?

**A. That during his whole life on earth, but especially at the end, Christ sustained in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race. This he did in order that, by his suffering as the only atoning sacrifice, he might deliver us, body and soul, from eternal condemnation, and gain for us God's grace, righteousness, and eternal life.**

Q. 38. Why did he suffer "under Pontius Pilate" as judge?

**A. So that he, though innocent, might be condemned by an earthly judge, and so free us from the severe judgment of God that was to fall on us.**

Q. 39. Is it significant that he was "crucified" instead of dying some other way?

**A. Yes. By this death I am convinced that he shouldered the curse which lay on me, since death by crucifixion was cursed by God.**

Martin Luther once said "many regard [the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostles' Creed] as a simple, trifling teaching, which they can absorb and master at one reading and then toss the book

into a corner.” But here’s what he of himself:

I say for myself...each morning, and whenever else I have time, I do as a child who is being taught the catechism and I read and recite word for word the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Psalms, etc. I must still read and study the catechism daily, and yet I cannot master it as I wish, but must remain a child and pupil of the catechism.<sup>1</sup>

Whenever we come to the heart of the Apostles’ Creed in the words about Jesus, “suffered...crucified,” we come to simple yet profound truths that need to captivate us again and again.

These simple words find their origin in the sacred words of the prophets such as Isaiah 53. Here is the profound promise of the Suffering Servant. “He was despised and rejected by men” as well as “smitten by God” (vv. 3, 4). While his soul was full of “grief” his body was “wounded” and “crushed” (vv. 3, 4). He is described here as an ancient sacrificial lamb, upon whom our iniquities were laid (v. 6). He was a substitute in the place of others, as he bore “our griefs,” “carried our sorrows,” “was wounded for our transgressions,” “crushed for our iniquities” (vv. 4, 5). Such simple words should ever be in our minds, on our hearts, and gush forth from our lips. Such profound words can sustain our souls in all their struggles.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Annotated Luther: Volume 2*, ed. Kirsi L. Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 2:290.

And in the explanation of these words here in the Heidelberg Catechism, I want you to note three contrasts that are made about our Lord's sufferings and crucifixion.

### **Whole Life/On the Cross**

First, there is the contrast between what happened to Jesus over the course of his *whole life and what happened to him on the cross*. When our Catechism answers the meaning of "suffering" in the Apostles' Creed, it begins by saying **that *during his whole life on earth, but especially at the end, Christ sustained in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race*** (Q. 37). And one of the texts offered is Isaiah 53.

*Jesus suffered for you by being despised and rejected his whole life*. He was the son of a mother who was unmarried at the time of his conception. He came to his own ethnic people, but they did not receive him. His own family called him out of his mind. *Jesus suffered for you by being a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief his whole life*. He bore your griefs and carried your sorrows his whole life. It's interesting that Matthew 8 says he did this in healing the sick and possessed throughout his ministry.

Of course the apex of this suffering was on the cross. Our passage is quoted in 1 Peter 2 where Peter says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on

the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”

## **Body/Soul**

Again, Q&A 37 speaks of the that word in the Creed, “suffered,” in terms of a contrast: *what happened to Jesus’ body and what happened to his soul*. His body was broken, his soul was crushed. His body was pierced, his soul was heartbroken. And you see that throughout Isaiah’s prophecy: his sorrow and grief of soul was expressed in his bearing and carrying our sorrows and griefs in his body his whole life, but especially on the cross!

And do you see the application of Jesus’ suffering whole life and especially his cross in body and soul? Look at Q&A 37 again: **that, by his suffering**—meaning in body and soul—**as the only atoning sacrifice, he might deliver us, body and soul, from eternal condemnation, and gain for us God’s grace, righteousness, and eternal life**. His suffering in body and soul is the grounds for my deliverance in body and soul from condemnation! And I already have been delivered in soul from God’s wrath and I stand under no condemnation; and I look forward to that redemption of my body on the last day when Jesus shall re-unite my soul and body.

## **Wrath of God/Judgment of Men**

Jesus' whole life and the cross; Jesus' body and soul. This brings us to a final contrast as outlined by question and answers 38–39. Jesus suffered *the wrath of God and the judgment of men*. Notice how Q&A 38 explains that intriguing clause in the Creed, “suffered *under Pontius Pilate*”: **so that he, though innocent, might be condemned by an earthly judge**. Why? It goes on: **and so free us from the severe judgment of God that was to fall on us**. Pilate stood in the place of God, earthly speaking, to show us what it would look for me and you to be condemned by God himself. He was condemned; I am now acquitted!

So why was he crucified? **Is it significant that he was “crucified” instead of dying some other way?** Absolutely! How so? **By this death I am convinced that he shouldered the curse which lay on me, since death by crucifixion was cursed by God**. What Isaiah is describing here tonight had been expressed in the law of God in Deuteronomy 21:23. Here we read that crimes worthy of death by hanging on a tree was a sign of his being cursed by God himself! And Paul interpreted Jesus cross in this way in Galatians 3: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”

And do you know what the benefit of that curse is for us? “So that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”

I pray these simple yet profound words—“suffered, crucified”—encourage you tonight and this week so that you can leave saying, “Jesus was cursed that I might be blessed.” Let us pray...