

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 41

Halifax, 22 June 2008

Q. 41 Why was our Mediator called Jesus?

A. Our Mediator was called Jesus because He saveth His people from their sins.

Introduction:

Before I went away on vacation, we completed the series of questions in the Larger Catechism on the two natures of Christ.

- We saw that in order for Him to be our Redeemer, it was necessary that He be both God and man—one person with two natures.
 - He has always been God, but in the fullness of time He became man—when He was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary,
 - but when He became man, He did not cease to be God, for that would be impossible.
 - The Bible shows that since His conception, He possesses two entire and complete natures, the human and the divine, and so it will ever be.
- But why was it necessary for Him to be both God and man if He was to redeem us?
 - He had to be man in order that He might be able to offer Himself for men;
 - yet, He had to be God in order that His sacrifice might be of infinite merit to atone for our sins and to provide eternal redemption.
 - He had to be man that He might advance our nature—so that dominion is restored to us when all things are brought under His feet,
 - and, He had to be God in order that He might be able to impart new life to all of us.
 - He had to be man in order that He might be tempted in all points as we are and that He might be able sympathise with us,
 - yet, He had to be God in order that He might be cognizant of all of our needs—the needs of millions of people at the same time—and to pray for us all.
- We get to have all the advantages of each nature, and we get to have these advantages blended together in a wonderfully harmonious way that makes Him the ideal Mediator...

- Once we understand it, it becomes patently obvious that all other redeemers and all other redemptive schemes are wholly inadequate...
- None can even come close to being all that He is to us—all that is needed to redeem us.
- This is why those who truly understand the gospel have always been very insistent that Christ is the only way.
 - Of course, the scripture says that this is so, but they understand *why* it is so—

But now as we move along in our study of the catechism, we come to a new section that has to do with our wonderful Redeemer—

- It is still about Him, but now we move from questions that have to do with His two natures to questions that have to do with His names and titles.
 - That He is called Jesus, that He is called Christ, that He is our prophet, priest and king.
 - That is what we will be looking at over the next few weeks.
 - And tonight, we begin with question 41 which asks:

Q. 41 Why was our Mediator called Jesus?

A. Our Mediator was called Jesus because He saveth His people from their sins.

Our scripture reading tonight is Matthew 1:18-25.

- READ Matthew 1:18-25

We are very familiar, of course, with the name Jesus, for it is the name of our Lord.

- We pray “in Jesus’ name,” and we speak about Him by this name all the time.
 - But Matthew 1:21 teaches us that this name was expressly chosen for Him by the Lord whose angel (or messenger) commanded it to be given to Him.
 - It was suited to Him because it described Him and the work that He was going to do.
 - Since God has given this name to Him, it is important for us to understand it.

I. So just what is the meaning and significance of the name Jesus?

A. The name “Jesus” was in fact a very common name among the Jews.

1. In Greek it is *Ihsouv* (*Iesous*) which we pronounce “Jesus”
 - and in Hebrew it is *ewvy* (*Yeshua*) from which we get “Joshua.”

2. Joshua (or Jesus) was the name that the Lord gave that great successor of Moses in the Old Testament who led Israel in the conquest of the Promised Land.
 - a. His name was at first *Hoshea* which means “helper” or “saviour” until it was changed by the Lord to *Yeshua*.
 - The change was formed by adding the name Yah or Jah which is the abbreviated form of the name *Yahweh* or *Jehovah* to the front of this name.
 - *Yahweh* is the name that God presented to Moses when He first called him to go to Egypt to deliver his people.
 - Perhaps you can remember this...in Exodus 3:13-14 it says:
 - **13 “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?”**
 - **14 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.’”**
 - “I AM” is *Yahweh* in Hebrew...
 - It is usually represented in our English Bibles by writing the word LORD in all capitals.
 - The meaning of this name is that God is the self-existing one—the one who is derived from nothing and dependent on nothing.
 - The one who is neither formed nor sustained, but who simply exists from all eternity and to all eternity as He is—the unchanging God of all glory.
 - When the shortened form of this name—Yah or Jah is prefixed to the name Hoshea,
 - we get “Yeshua” or “Joshua” which means:
 - “Jehovah is salvation” or
 - “Jehovah is the Saviour.”
 - b. This was, of course, a very suitable name for Joshua of the Old Testament who brought Israel into Canaan.
 - His constant encouragement to the people was that the Lord, Jehovah, was the one who would bring them into His promised salvation,
 - despite all the obstacles that seemed to stand in their way—
 - a land full of fortified cities and giants and well trained soldiers when Israel had been but slaves from Egypt who had not known war and who are not armed for war.

- Joshua's constant message was to trust in the Lord—that Jehovah was the one who would bring them into their salvation.
- B. But this name takes on a much greater significance when it is given to Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God!
- a significance that cults like the Jehovah Witnesses refuse to accept.
1. When the name “Jehovah is salvation” is given to the Son of Man, it is to represent that He Himself is Jehovah who has come to save His people from their sins.
 - a. No longer is the name given to a mere man who only points to the Lord Jehovah as the only Saviour...
 - b. Now it is given to a man who is Himself Jehovah the Saviour!
 - The babe born to Mary is Himself the self-existing Son of God born in human flesh to save His people from their sins!
 2. You can see that this is so from Matthew 1:21 and its context.
 - a. First, in that it says “for He shall save His people from their sins.”
 - With these words, He is presented as the agent of salvation and not merely as the one the Lord will use to save His people...
 - What's more, the people are called “His people,” the people of this Saviour.
 - All through the scripture, God calls those He has chosen for salvation, “My people,”
 - and here, the fact that they are referred to as the people who belong to this one who is to be called “Jesus”, points to Him as Jehovah who saves.
 - It would be unusual to speak this way of Him if this were not so...
 - When the Lord refers to Moses or Joshua or Paul, can you imagine Him saying of any one of them,
 - “He will save his people from their sins?”
 - He might indeed say “He will save **My** people,” meaning that this one would be His agent of salvation,
 - but when He calls the people the people of this Saviour, it indicates that this Saviour is Himself the Lord Jehovah.

TRANS> This alone would not prove that this one named Jesus is Himself Jehovah, however, without the context of Matthew 1:21...

- b. The nearer context explains that He would be born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit...
 - and that He would be none other than Emmanuel which means “God with us.”
 - And then even more conclusively, we learn in chapter 3 of Matthew that He is the one for whom John the Baptist prepares the way...
 - And that that one is none other than Jehovah...
 - or Yahweh, the self-existing one...
 - The passage is quoted from Isaiah, and it uses the divine name Yahweh to refer to the one whose way John was to prepare.
 - This is borne out all the more when John goes on to ascribe judgement to Him and then hears a voice from heaven declaring, “This is my beloved Son.”
 - Only the wilfully ignorant could deny that this one called Jesus is Himself Jehovah...
 - but if anyone still wishes to dispute it, let him see how the book of Matthew goes on to present Jesus as one teaches and heals in His own name...
 - He even dares to forgive sin in His own name...
 - He is confessed by Peter not only to be the Christ, but also the Son of the living God...
 - He is transfigured before His disciples...
 - He speaks of Himself as the one coming to judge...
 - He goes to the cross as an offering for sin and then is raised up with all authority to make disciples of Himself.

TRANS> Clearly, when the name “Jehovah is salvation” is given to Him, it is because He is none other than Jehovah, the self-existing God Himself, come to save His people from their sins.

- That is the meaning and the significance of the name “Jesus” as it is given to Him.
- But now the question must be asked:

II. What does it mean when it says that Jesus will “save His people from their sins?”

- In what way does He save them?

- A. This question can be answered best by looking back to the revelation of the Old Testament about Him in the light of how that revelation is fulfilled in the New Testament.
1. Sadly, there is a tendency in our day to try to build theology without the foundation that God Himself has given us in the Old Testament.
 - There are those who even pride themselves in being “New Testament Christians.”
 - But the New Testament itself is constantly pointing us to the scriptures of the Old Testament.
 - Those who neglect this foundation often end up with Jesus as a Saviour of whatever they happen to want Him to be a Saviour of...
 - He becomes the Saviour from a poor self-image or of a nation that is having political problems.
 - Without a solid understanding of the Old Testament (and I don't just mean a few specific prophecies, but the overall great themes of the Old Testament)
 - He sometimes becomes a Saviour in only one sense to the neglect of others...
 - a Saviour from sorrow but not from sin...
 - or a Saviour from bad behaviour but not a Saviour from judgement...
 - or a Saviour from meaningless, purposeless life, but not a Saviour from guilt and depravity.
 2. You must understand that God's revelation about Jesus doesn't begin out of nothing when He appears in the fullness of time...
 - You can only make sense out of calling Him “Jehovah is salvation” when you understand what the salvation is that is revealed by God in the Old Testament.
 - The angel who said, “You shall call His name Jesus because He shall save His people from their sins,”
 - was speaking in the full context of all that had been revealed about Jehovah as Saviour up until that time.
 - Luke particularly, in his gospel, presents to us how this salvation as it was revealed in the Old Testament was properly understood.
 - He does that by recording a number of prophetic statements that were uttered about Jesus at the time of His birth...
 - at the time when He was given this name Jesus and was presented as “Jehovah who saves”

B. Let me now show you what was properly understood about the salvation that Jesus was to bring according to these Old Testament based, divinely inspired, utterances...

1. Let me begin by quickly surveying these inspired statements about Jesus.

a. First, there is the utterance of the angel Gabriel to Mary in Luke 1:30-33

- READ Luke 1:30-33
- You can see in these verses that He is presented as the One who is take the throne of His father David forever...
 - The Old Testament devotes much attention to David's throne because it was to become the seat of Jesus Christ.
 - There is the great revelation of David's son in 2 Samuel 7 which is spoken of again and again by the prophets.

b. Second, there is the utterance of Mary in Luke 1:46-55

- This utterance takes up the great theme of God's mercy to deliver those who look to Him out of their sorrow and misery,
 - and it shows how God will frustrate the proud...

c. Then, thirdly, there is the utterance of John the Baptist's father Zacharias in Luke 1:67-79

- He speaks of the redemption that Jesus will bring, redemption from the hand of our enemies and redemption from our sins...

d. Fourthly, there is Simeon in Luke 2:25-32,

- who speaks of the promise that the salvation that has now come is to be a salvation for all the nations...

e. And finally Anna in Luke 2:36-38...

- This dear old saint goes to all her friends to tell them that the redemption God had promised and that they were waiting for has at last come—
 - It has come in the child Jesus, Jehovah saves...

TRANS> Now having briefly surveyed these great utterances that are all based on the revelation that God had given in the Old Testament about Jehovah who saves (Jesus),

2. I want to now show you what it is, according to these inscripturated prophecies, that Jesus came to save us from.

- Of course we have seen that He is called Jesus because He saves us from our sins, but just what does this mean according to scripture?
- a. Well first, you can see that these utterances speak of salvation from enemies.
- 1) This is implied in Gabriel’s announcement that Jesus would take the throne of David...
- You will remember that in the time of the Judges, the nations continually threatened to wipe Israel out...
 - either by destroying them or by absorbing them...
 - And the judges kept being raised up by God to deliver them...
 - They were saviours sent by God to deliver His people...
 - And then finally David came, and God promised that his throne would endure forever...
 - and that in David’s Son, the Lord would put all His enemies under His feet.
- a) In Luke 1:51-51, Mary speaks of this as scattering the proud in the imaginations of their hearts and bringing down the mighty from their thrones...
- **Luke 1:51-52: “He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered *the* proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from *their* thrones, and exalted *the* lowly.”**
- b) And Zacharias speaks of it as being saved from our enemies and from all those that hate us in verse 71,
- a thing which he declares to be expressed in the promise to David since the world began (v. 69-70).
 - This is a great and sweeping theme that takes in the promise in Genesis 3 of the woman’s seed crushing the serpent’s head,
 - is taken up with the deliverance of Jacob from Esau,
 - of Israel from Egypt,
 - of Israel from Babylon,
 - and so on and so on...
 - It is a major theme...
- 2) This is what Christ came to do—to destroy His and our enemies...
- The chief enemy in view is Satan...

- He is the great father of human rebellion...
- He is the one that wars against God and that brought the whole human race into enmity with God in the beginning...
- Jesus comes to destroy his work, to free us from his power and dominion even as He freed Israel from Egypt and Babylon.
 - Israel was redeemed from Egypt so that they might serve God...
 - As long as we are under the dominion of Satan, we could not serve Him,
 - but Jesus is Jehovah our salvation who delivers us from him.
 - He releases us from his power and dominion so that we might serve God.
 - Zacharias puts it quite perfectly when he says:
 - Luke 1:74-75: "To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life."
- In the end, Jesus will completely subdue Satan and all who are in league with him,
 - casting them all into the Lake of Fire so that we will be able to serve God forever without their opposition.

TRANS> But to understand the problem of our enemies according to the OT revelation,

- we must remember that the enemies not only try to destroy those who serve God,
 - but also try to draw us away from God with sweet enticements and temptation...
 - That is how the trouble all began—when Satan seduced us in the Garden of Eden...
 - And seduction was every bit as much a problem for Israel as captivity by force...
 - This leads us to a second, related theme of how Christ saves us...
- b. He comes not only as a warrior to confine our enemies to the dungeon, but also as reformer to turn our hearts to God...

- 1) David, His type, enforced the Law of God, and led Israel into obedience.
 - He was himself a man after God's own heart, and he led the people to obedience.
 - It would do no good for our enemies to be destroyed if our hearts were not turned to God...
 - What would it have accomplished if David had conquered all the nations around Israel and then had set up idol worship?
 - No, there must also be reformation of the people's lives.
 - There must be a turning of hearts to God.
 - And this turning of hearts is something that Jesus does...
 - He is the one who changes us so that we can serve God.

- 2) This is not spoken of as much in the utterances in Luke because those who are speaking already have hearts that are turned to God!
 - a) They are born again and they eagerly desire to serve God...
 - They are already looking to be freed from the bondage of sin.
 - The hope of Simeon is that the Gentiles will also be brought to the light of God's salvation—to the life that He has for us,
 - In Luke 2:32, he says that Jesus will be:
 - **Luke 2:32: "A light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel."**
 - b) So for those who are uttering these prophecies,
 - being saved from their enemies is being saved from all that keeps them from serving God...
 - They are like Paul who desires to serve God, but finds that sin is still present with him.
 - Again, the words of Zacharias in Luke 1:74-75 can be brought to service...
 - The goal is not just to be freed from oppression of enemies, but from their influence that leads us away from God...
 - that we might serve God "in holiness and righteousness" all the days of our lives.

- 3) The promise and the work of salvation revealed in the Old Testament is the promise of a new heart from God...
 - The promise of a heart devoted to God.

- This is what Jesus brings as Jehovah our salvation.
- He is the One who gives us the Holy Spirit to take away the heart of stone and to give us a heart of flesh.
 - Blessed be His glorious name forever!
 - He frees us not only from the oppression of Satan, but also from service to him.

TRANS> But there is still more to this salvation; there is yet another crucial aspect...

- Jehovah Himself comes to save us not only from our enemies, not only from our corruption...

c. But He comes in Jesus to save us from His own judgement.

1) This is a most remarkable thing, for God is justly offended with us for our rebellion—for allowing ourselves to be enticed and led away by Satan in the first place...

a) We, who were made in the image of God and given the awesome privilege of serving God, have cast off our service...

- We sinned against the One who made us for Himself...
- We spit in His face as the One who graciously made us to live in sweet communion with Him.
- We rejected the One who graciously revealed His glorious self to us with a promise of more so that we might delight in Him and admire Him and worship Him with loving adoration,
 - filled to fullness of joy in Him, lost in the wonder of His excellence and glory.
- We transgressed the way of love and truth and set ourselves in the way of hatred and corruption.

TRANS> Truly we deserve the severest wrath and judgement.

b) And so God responded by sentencing us to the same punishment which He prepared for the one who seduced us...

- we were sentenced to death, to the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, to the lake of fire that is never quenched.
- Such is what our sins deserve.

2) But in mercy, the Lord our God promised the remission of sins.

- As we saw in Matthew 1:21, Jesus is called Jesus because He saves us from our sins...
 - And in Luke 1:77, Zacharias describes this as God giving through Christ “salvation to His people by the remission of their sins...”
 - To remit sin is to dismiss it—to cancel it from the record—to forgive it.
 - John the Baptist also spoke of Jesus in this regard when he said in John’s gospel that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
 - But what did John mean when He called Jesus “the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world?”
 - We know from Old Testament revelation!
 - Throughout there is the shedding of blood for the remission of sin.
 - There is this huge, elaborate system of Old Testament worship with its many offerings, its priests, its sacrifices,
 - all showing the shedding of blood for the remission of sin...
 - This is what was shown to be required of God’s people through those ceremonies...
 - but as they were obviously only symbolic, they could not actually take away their sins.
 - In the Old Testament, there is the promise to Abraham when told to offer Isaac as a sacrifice of atonement that God Himself would provide the lamb...
 - And there is the great prophecy in Isaiah 53 of the one on whom all our iniquities would be laid and by whose stripes they would be healed.
- 3) And what is so very remarkable about this One called Jesus, is that in Him, Jehovah Himself comes not only to deliver us from our enemies, not only to liberate us from our corruption and rebellion,
- but He comes Himself to be the sacrifice that takes away our sin!
 - This is what the true Christian faith is all about!

- This is what the world despises and what the unbelieving portion of the church attacks!
- They are embarrassed by a God that would come and bear His people's sin...
 - They cannot deal with such grace and love...
 - perhaps even more, they cannot deal honestly with the fact that their demerit is such that these measures were necessary!
 - "Surely God is big enough to overlook our sin...we are but creatures," they protest...
 - But the truth is that God is too just and too holy to overlook so great an offence as we have committed.
 - The problem is that they refuse to face the demerit of their sin—of our sin...
- But oh what joy it brings to those who realise that the great self-existing God is the One who offered Himself for their sins!
 - That Jesus is Jehovah Himself, come to save them from their sins!
 - What assurance, what confidence, what adoration of this great God who condescends to love His creatures so well!
 - Come and drink from the wells of this salvation!
 - Come and feed upon this Saviour...
 - Come and live in rich sweet eternal communion with Him through the salvation that He so graciously secures!
 - To Jesus be the glory for ever and ever!