

As Jacob’s life comes to an end, he calls each of his sons in to bless them. Today’s reading centers on the blessing that Jacob gave to his son Judah. Read it again because what Jacob says to Judah is very significant. First, Judah was not Jacob’s first-born son. This is a significant fact to think about as you consider what Jacob says to Judah. As we saw earlier in the story of Jacob and Esau, the normal thing would be for the oldest son to receive a blessing that would point to him ruling over the rest of the family. That was the normal way things happened in that day. The older brother took the position of leadership. But as you look at Jacob’s blessing of Judah, notice what Jacob says at the end of verse 8 and then again in verse 10. As he blesses Judah, Jacob makes a proclamation that Judah’s brothers will bow down to him, and then in verse 10 Jacob continues and says, “The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.” Jacob’s proclamation/prophecy is stunning. Stop and think about what he is saying. Judah will not only rule his brothers, but one day rule the nations. Jacob’s prophecy was initially and partially fulfilled when David, the son of Jesse, from the tribe of Judah, became King over all twelve tribes of Israel. But it was ultimately fulfilled when Jesus, from David’s family line and the tribe of Judah, rose from the grave and ascended to the right hand of God, where he is seated today as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Acts 2:36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

The words Lord and Christ are words filled with significance. In Greek, the word Christ meant the anointed one, the Messiah, the future king that God had promised would come from Abraham’s seed, through the tribe of Judah, and the family of David. The word “Lord” means king or ruler.

In Revelation chapter 5, John has a vision of the throne room of heaven, and the center of that vision is the Lion of Judah, who is also the Lamb of God—Jesus from the tribe of Judah.

Revelation 5:5-6 See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne.

Everything that Jacob said to his son Judah was pointing ahead to the Lion of Judah—Jesus our Lord.

<u>First Catechism</u>	<u>Westminster Shorter Catechism</u>
Question 72. How is Christ your king? Christ rules over me, the world and Satan, and he defends me.	Q. 26. How does Christ fill the office of a king? Christ fills the office of a king in making us his willing subjects, in ruling and defending us,[a] and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.[b] [a]. Psa 110:3; Mat 28:18-20; John 17:2; Col 1:13 [b]. Psa 2:6-9; Psa 110:1-2; Mat 12:28; 1 Cor 15:24-26; Col 2:15

Question 1. What does it mean that Jesus is King? What is He King over? Do you recognize His authority over all things, including over your life?

Question 2. Are you willingly and joyfully serving Jesus as your king? What areas of your life are you tempted to not recognize His authority over? What areas are difficult for you to serve Jesus joyfully in, and why do you think that is?

Joseph's brothers had wronged him terribly when they sold him into slavery, and they knew it. Now their father was dead, and they were afraid of what Joseph might do to them to pay them back for the wrong they had done to him. Joseph's answer to their fear is one of the most profound things that any human will say in the Bible. Joseph's answer to his brothers shows a deep understanding of God's sovereignty (control of all things) and the meaning of mercy and forgiveness. Read verses 19 – 21 again:

Genesis 50:19-21 "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children."

As Joseph looked back and saw all that had happened in his life, and how God had worked through all those things to accomplish his purposes, Joseph understood that what had happened to him because of his brother's bad intentions was all part of God's plan to bring good to Joseph, his brothers, and the generation of the Israelites who would follow them, and that allows Joseph to forgive his brothers completely.

Now fast forward to the New Testament. What did Jesus say as we nailed him to the cross?

Luke 23:34 "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

The men who were nailing Jesus to the cross had no idea who he really was. To them he was just a man—a man pretending to be a king. They had no idea they were actually nailing God to the cross. Why would they even begin to think that? What God would ever allow his own creation to rebel against him in such a way that they kill him? Why did God do such a thing? God allowed his son, Jesus, to be crucified to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Romans 5:7-10 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

What we intended for harm God intended for good to accomplish His purpose of redeeming His elect.

New City Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
Question 2. What is God? God is the creator and sustainer of everyone and everything. He is eternal, infinite, and unchangeable in his power and perfection, goodness and glory, wisdom, justice, and truth. Nothing happens except through him and by his will.	Q. 28. How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us? A. We can be patient when things go against us, ¹ thankful when things go well, ² and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing in creation will separate us from his love. ³ For all creatures are so completely in God's hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved. ⁴ 1 Job 1:21-22; James 1:3 2 Deut. 8:10; 1 Thess. 5:18 3 Ps. 55:22; Rom. 5:3-5; 8:38-39 4 Job 1:12; 2:6; Prov. 21:1; Acts 17:24-28

Question 1. If you have a right understand of God's sovereignty over all things, how will you live your life? How does that understanding change how you forgive others? Or share the Gospel? Or persevere through trials?

Question 2. What can we learn about forgiveness from this passage?

Question 3. Redemptively, from the beginning of Genesis to the end, how have we seen God use man's sinful decisions to accomplish His good purpose for His people?

Today's reading focuses on the early life of Moses, the part of his life that prepared him for what he was to do with the rest of his life. As we looked at Joseph, we saw many parallels between Joseph's life and Jesus; however, the opposite is true when we compare Moses' early life with Jesus'. There is a definite contrast between the two. Moses' parents were slaves in Egypt, and then through God's sovereign protection and his mother's ingenuity, Moses ended up in the palace, growing up as if he was royalty. God did this to prepare Moses for what was to come in his latter life. He learned how to govern as he grew up in the palace. But then as we continue to read, Moses is forced to flee from his royal lifestyle out into the desert, after he took matters into his own hands and became judge, jury, and executioner to an Egyptian slave driver. So, Moses went into the desert to escape punishment. He was there for forty years, and in those forty years he learned humility. Now God had a man he could use, a man who knew how to lead, but also a man who had been humbled, and was ready to obey God and lead his people from slavery to freedom.

Jesus' early life was almost an exact opposite. Moses started as the child of slaves--Jesus started as the Son of God. As a baby, Moses went from the humble dwelling of his parents to the palace of Pharaoh; Jesus went from the throne room of his Father in Heaven to a peasant girl in a stable in Bethlehem. Moses condemned and passed judgment on that Egyptian slave master; Jesus passed judgment on no one and condemned no one.

John 8:15 You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one.

John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Moses went into the wilderness because he was defeated by his sin; Jesus went into the wilderness led by the Spirit to defeat the power of sin.

Mark 1:12-13 At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan.

But what both Jesus and Moses had in common was that God was using suffering in their lives to mold them and prepare them for what He had called them to do.

Hebrews 5:7-9 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>Question 52. What kind of life did Christ live on earth?</p> <p>A life of obedience, service and suffering.</p>	<p>Q. 37. What do you understand by the word "suffered"?</p> <p>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.¹ This he did in order that, by his suffering as the only atoning sacrifice,² he might deliver us, body and soul, from eternal condemnation,³ and gain for us God's grace, righteousness, and eternal life.⁴</p> <p>1 Isa. 53; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18 2 Rom. 3:25; Heb. 10:14; 1 John 2:2; 4:10 3 Rom. 8:1-4; Gal. 3:13 4 John 3:16; Rom. 3:24-26</p>

Question 1. If Moses had to suffer to get ready for what God had for him to do, and if Jesus had to suffer to get ready for what God had sent him to do, what purpose might suffering have in our lives? See Romans 5:3-5

Question 2. What does this passage teach us about God always keeping His promises? (Reread 2:23-25)

Question 3. We can't always see God working, or understand what He is doing, but what has God given us to teach us that we can always trust Him?

In today's reading, we find the account of Moses and the burning bush. The account tells us that Moses, while tending sheep, saw a bush that was on fire, but was not being consumed by the fire. As Moses walked over to the bush, a voice came from the bush telling Moses that he was in the presence of God and the ground that he was standing on was holy ground. You may recall that when we were looking at Jacob's life we read about a time when Jacob wrestled with God, and we used the word theophany to describe this. A theophany is a visible manifestation of God. This burning bush certainly qualifies as that. But most scholars believe that this burning bush was not just a theophany, it was also a pre-incarnate (before his birth) Old Testament visitation of Jesus. Why would they think this? Well, we'll see more in tomorrow's reading, but as we consider today's reading, we can see why as well. In John 1: 1, Jesus is called the Word.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Jesus is the revealer of God to us. Just as the bush revealed God to Moses, Jesus reveals God to us. When we see Jesus and think about Jesus, we see God.

John 14:9 Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

John 17:6 "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.

The voice that came from the bush gave Moses specific instructions concerning what Moses was to do for his people. The bush didn't just reveal God to Moses, it also revealed what God wanted from Moses. Jesus does the same for us.

But as we keep reading this account from Exodus 3, we see a God who comes down from heaven to come close to his people. We see a God who has compassion on his children who are suffering. We see a God who comes to rescue his people from slavery.

All those things about God that the voice in the bush revealed to Moses are the same things we see Jesus do as he comes to earth and reveals God to us. He came close to us by taking on flesh and living among us.

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

He has compassion on those who are suffering.

Matthew 9:35-36 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

He rescues us from our slavery to sin.

Galatians 4:3-5 So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 70. How is Christ your prophet? Christ teaches me the will of God.	Q. 24. How does Christ fill the office of a prophet? Christ fills the office of a prophet in revealing to us by his Word[a] and Spirit[b] the will of God for our complete salvation.[c] [a]. Luk 4:18-19, 21; Acts 1:1-2; Heb 2:3 [b]. John 15:26-27; Acts 1:8; 1 Pet 1:11 [c]. John 4:41-42; John 20:30-31

Question 1. Are you amazed God chose Moses? What does this teach us about God? How does it encourage you?

As we continue the account of Moses and the burning bush, Moses asks God what he should tell the Israelites if they ask what the name of the God is who has been sent to rescue us. God's response reveals a great deal about who God is. The response seems to be cryptic—a mystery to solve, but what God is saying really isn't a mystery at all. The name that God says Moses is tell the Israelites is found in verse 14, "I AM WHO I AM." That is the name of the God who would rescue Israel from slavery. What does that name mean? It means that God is all-sufficient; He doesn't need or depend on anyone for His existence. That name means that God is eternal, and all powerful—able to accomplish whatever He desires to do. He does not need anyone or anything. He is all in all—completely self-sufficient. Those words "I AM WHO I AM" are the words that become God's Hebrew name "Yahweh." Just a side point, but whenever you see the word "LORD" in all capital letters in your Bible, it is referring to the name Yahweh.

So what does all of this have to do with Jesus? We don't have to guess because Jesus tells us throughout the Gospel of John. Seven different times in that Gospel, Jesus refers to himself with the words I AM.

John 6:51 "I AM the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever;"

John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I AM the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

John 8:58 Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."

John 10:9 "I AM the gate. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture." John 10:11 "I AM the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, "I AM the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I AM the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

John 15:1 "I AM the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

Jesus was very intentionally using this phrase to tell us who he is. He isn't just bread, or a good shepherd, or a light, or life, or a vine, he is God—the Great I Am. As God, Jesus is the spiritual bread that nourishes our faith; he is the light that exposes evil and brings us out of darkness; he is the good shepherd that watches over us and defends us; he is the vine that supports us, feeds us, and allows us to bear fruit; he is eternal (John 8:58) and the only way to eternal life. He is Yahweh.

<u>First Catechism</u>	<u>Westminster Shorter Catechism</u>
Question 7. In how many Persons does this one God exist? In three Persons. 8. Name these three Persons. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.	Q. 6. How many persons are there in the Godhead? There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit;[a] and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.[b] [a]. Mat 3:16-17; Mat 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Pet 1:2 [b]. Psa 45:6; John 1:1; John 17:5; Acts 5:3-4; Rom 9:5; Col 2:9; Jud 1:24-25

Question 1. What does Yahweh mean? How can knowing this name of God help you to have confidence and complete trust in Him?

God called Moses to go and rescue his people, the Israelites, from slavery and oppression in Egypt, but as we read these verses, we see that Moses didn't really think he was up to the task. The question Moses asked in yesterday's reading was really a very good question.

Exodus 3:11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

That is a question we should always ask when we believe God has called us to do something: Who am I? If you remember from yesterday's reading, God answers that question by saying who He is, and then in today's reading God gives Moses extra tools to do the work He has called him to do. In verses 1 to 9, God shows Moses the extraordinary powers that Moses will have to do miracles to validate his calling and his message to the people of Israel and to Pharaoh. But Moses still isn't satisfied because Moses is worried about his speech, so God gives Moses his brother Aaron to be his spokesman.

Jesus has called us and gives us an enormous task. Jesus has told us that we are to take the message of his gospel to the ends of the earth.

Matthew 28:19-20 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

But like God did with Moses, Jesus does not leave us on our own, nor expect us to do this in our own power. Just as God gave Moses his staff and Aaron, Jesus gives us his Holy Spirit to live inside of us, to empower us, and to speak for us.

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Luke 12:11-12 "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."

New City Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
Question 37. How Does the Holy Spirit Help Us? The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, comforts us, guides us, gives us spiritual gifts and the desire to obey God; and he enables us to pray and to understand God's Word.	Q. 53. What do you believe concerning "the Holy Spirit"? A. First, that the Spirit, with the Father and the Son, is eternal God. ¹ Second, that the Spirit is given also to me, ² so that, through true faith, he makes me share in Christ and all his benefits, ³ comforts me, ⁴ and will remain with me forever. ⁵ 1 Gen. 1:1-2; Matt. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4 2 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Gal. 4:6 3 Gal. 3:14 4 John 15:26; Acts 9:31 5 John 14:16-17; 1 Pet. 4:14

Question 1. Are you relying on your own strength to serve? What would a complete reliance on God look like in your life? How would it change how you go about your responsibility of sharing the Gospel?

Question 2. Can we use our weaknesses as an excuse to not serve? When have you been tempted to in the past? How do our weaknesses magnify God's name?

In Chapter 4, God proves to Moses that Moses is the man to lead Israel out of Egypt. God even sends Aaron out to meet Moses while Moses is still on the way. Moses and Aaron excitedly tell the Israelites everything that God has said and done, and it causes the Israelites to bow and worship the Lord. But something very interesting happens as God sends Moses and Aaron to meet with Pharaoh. Pharaoh says, “No!” In fact, what Pharaoh says exactly is:

Exodus 5: 2 “Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go.”

Moses and Aaron were probably a little taken back by this, and they probably thought Pharaoh would just say yes. It’s clear that the Israelites didn’t expect Pharaoh to respond this way, or they probably would not have allowed Moses to go to Pharaoh. They didn’t want life to get harder; they wanted life to get easier. There is a strain of thinking in American Christianity that is like the Israelites thinking, that when a person becomes a Christian life should get easier. But Jesus never promised that. In fact, just the opposite:

John 16:33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

That is why Jesus said over and over again that if a person wants to have a relationship with Christ, they must be willing to take up their cross and follow him. Jesus walked down the road marked with suffering, and as his followers (if we are following him) we should expect to travel the same road. When the Apostle Paul became a Christian, he went from an easy life to a life of unimaginable suffering. He records some of that suffering as he defends his ministry in:

2 Corinthians 11: 21 – 29 But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

All of that suffering was because of Christ. But the story of Moses and the Israelites ends in Egypt. Life does get harder for a while for them, but God triumphs over Pharaoh. Now think of what Jesus said in John 16:33, when he promised us that in this life, we would have trouble. He also said, “Take hope, I have overcome the world.” We know how the story will end. Jesus has defeated Satan, sin and death. He has triumphed. Whatever you are dealing with today, take heart. Jesus has overcome.

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 142. Where is Christ now? In heaven, ruling his kingdom and interceding for us.	Q. 28. In what does Christ’s exaltation consist? Christ’s exaltation consists in his rising again from the dead on the third day;[a] in ascending into heaven; [b] in sitting at the right hand[c] of God the Father; and in coming to judge the world at the last day.[d] [a]. 1 Cor 15:4 [b]. Psa 68:18; Acts 1:11; Eph 4:8 [c]. Psa 110:1; Acts 2:33-34; Heb 1:3 [d]. Mat 16:27; Acts 17:31

Question 1. How, from this passage, do we see that God works to conform us during suffering? In whose likeness is He conforming us to?

Today, we find out why God allowed Pharaoh's heart to be hardened. It was so God could show Pharaoh, the Egyptians, the Israelites, and even the watching world what His mighty hand and outstretched arm can do. Forty years later, when Israel finally begins the conquest of the Promised Land, people will still be talking about what God did to Pharaoh.

Joshua 2: 9 (Rahab) said to the men, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

There is no question that what happened to the Israelites in Egypt and even in the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land made them miserable, but God was using what was happening to accomplish His purpose.

1500 years later, as Jesus walked the earth and performed his earthly ministry, Jesus and his disciples came across a man who was born blind. The encounter resulted in the following conversation:

John 9: 1 – 3 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

God's greatness is best displayed through our weakness. The Apostle Paul was afflicted with what he referred to as a thorn in the flesh. (The Greek word for thorn is actually more like a stake. Meaning that Paul wasn't just pricked and irritated by what was going on but was impaled by whatever it was.) Paul prayed for this "thorn" to be removed. Here is what Paul says God's response was to his plea:

2 Corinthians 12: 9 -10 "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Through weakness God's power is displayed and God is glorified, but through our suffering God also brings good to our lives.

Romans 8: 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

<u>First Catechism</u>	<u>Westminster Shorter Catechism</u>
Question 32. What Does Sanctification Mean? Sanctification means our gradual, growing righteousness, made possible by the Spirit's work in us.	Q. 35. What is sanctification? Sanctification is the work of God's free grace[a] by which we are renewed throughout in the image of God[b] and are enabled more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness.[c] [a]. Eze 36:27; Php 2:13; 2 Thes 2:13 [b]. 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 4:23-24; 1 Thes 5:23 [c]. Eze 36:25-27; Rom 6:4, 6, 12-14; 2 Cor 7:1; 1 Pet 2:24

Question 1. Through the suffering of Israel in Egypt, what characteristics of God were displayed? As a result, how did Israel's faith strengthen? Is the same true in our lives? See 1 Peter 1:3-9.

Question 2. How many times does God use the phrase "I am the Lord" in this passage? What does that tell us about his faithfulness to his covenant promise of redemption?

In today's reading we read about the first of the miracles God performed through Moses. We commonly refer to the miracles that Moses performed as the Ten Plagues on Egypt. We won't read about each of them, but just to refresh your memory, after God turned the water of Egypt to blood, there were nine other plagues: a plague of frogs, a plague of gnats, a plague of flies, a plague on livestock, a plague of boils, hail, a plague of locusts, darkness, and finally the death of the first-born son in each Egyptian family. As you read today's reading you see that Pharaoh's court magicians were able to duplicate the first few miracles that God performed through Moses and Aaron, but from the plague of gnats on, they couldn't keep up with the power of God. In fact, in Exodus 8:19, they are forced to admit that "This is the finger of God."

In God's power and might, he could have made Pharaoh give up his hold on the Israelites without unleashing all of these miraculous plagues, but instead God chose to put on a show for everyone to see; why? As you read Scripture you come across times when the power of God is displayed in amazing ways. In fact, if you were to analyze Scripture carefully, you would see that whenever God wants to reveal himself in a new way to people, there are always miracles that confirm that what is happening is from "the finger of God." We always think of these miracles in terms of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and how they viewed the God of Israel, but remember the Israelites also need to know that their God was powerful who was worthy of trust, obedience, and complete worship. These miracles that happened in Egypt weren't just to bring Pharaoh to his knees, they were also designed to bring the Israelites to their knees—to make a lasting impression on them, so that they would know who their God was and what he could do.

As we look forward to the New Testament and to Jesus' coming, we see the same principal at work. The miracles Jesus did weren't just to put on a show or draw a crowd. They were specifically done to impress upon people that he was who he claimed to be—the Son of God.

When John the Baptist was in prison, he sent some of his disciples to find out if Jesus was indeed, the real deal. Look how Jesus answers John's question:

Matthew 11:2-5 When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.

Jesus is saying the miracles he performed proved that he was the Messiah, the one they had been waiting for, the Son of God.

John 10:37-38 Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father."

New City Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
Question 21. What Sort of Redeemer is Needed to Bring Us Back to God? One who is truly human and also truly God.	Q. 18. Then who is this mediator— true God and at the same time a true and righteous human? A. Our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹ who was given to us to completely deliver us and make us right with God. ² 1 Matt. 1:21-23; Luke 2:11; 1 Tim. 2:5 2 1 Cor. 1:30

Question 1. Just as God proved himself to the Israelites as the great God who alone was worthy of their worship, how has Jesus proved himself to be the Son of God who is worthy of our faith, worship, and obedience? How does an increasing awareness of God and who we are motivate us to worship and serve Him more?

In spite of all of the plagues that God unleashed on the Egyptians and Pharaoh, Pharaoh's heart remained hard. Even though his eyes saw the hand of God at work, his heart refused to believe that he should bow down and worship God. God allowed Pharaoh's heart to follow the path it wanted to follow. God allowed his heart to be hard so that God's plan and God's purpose could be accomplished. Pharaoh was the most powerful ruler in his day, and he had no desire to give up that power. The Apostle Paul gives us a glimpse into the heart of man in Romans 1.

Romans 1:18-23 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

God didn't force Pharaoh's heart to be hard; it naturally came that way. What God did was allow Pharaoh's heart to go where it wanted to go. Pharaoh could see the truth, but his hard heart chose not to believe it.

The same was true in Jesus' day. The Pharisees were very comfortable in their position of power. They didn't want anyone to mess it up. So, no matter what miracles Jesus did, they simply chose not to believe—just as Pharaoh's heart was hard, so was theirs. In John 11 we find the miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. You would think that a miracle of this magnitude would soften the hearts of the Pharisees and make them believe in Jesus, but as we read what happened, we see the miracle did just the opposite.

John 11:47-53 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

Like Pharaoh, the Pharisees wanted to protect their place and their power, and they were willing to do anything to keep it—even if it meant putting the Son of God to death. Just as the hardness of Pharaoh's heart was all part of God's plan, so too, was the hardness of the Pharisees' hearts. Just like with Pharaoh, God worked through the hardness of the Pharisees' hearts to accomplish his purpose. Moses came to Egypt to set his people free; Jesus came to earth to set us free. For that to happen, Jesus had to go to the cross and die.

Romans 8:1-2 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

In order to melt Pharaoh's heart, God took Pharaoh's firstborn son. In order to melt our hearts, God gave his only son.

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 62. Can you repent and believe in Christ by your own power? No. I cannot repent and believe unless the Holy Spirit changes my heart.	Q. 30. How does the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ? The Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ by producing faith in us,[a] and by this uniting us to Christ in our effective calling.[b] [a]. Rom 10:17; 1 Cor 2:12-16; Eph 2:8; Php 1:29 [b]. John 15:5; 1 Cor 1:9; Eph 3:17

Question 1. Today, the message of the cross is often rejected- why? Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. Who is the only One who can soften a hard heart? Read Ezekiel 36:26. How does that truth humble you?

The final plague that God unleashed on the Egyptians was a plague that caused the death of the firstborn son of each Egyptian family. We can only imagine the horror of that night as death went from one house to another – even Pharaoh’s family was not spared. The only homes that were spared were those that were shielded by the blood of the lamb. It was only the homes that had followed God’s instructions and placed the lamb’s blood on the doorframes of the homes that were spared that awful night.

As you read this passage, stop and consider all the things the blood of the Lamb did for those who painted it on their doorframes. First, as we have already pointed out, it saved them from death. Second, it marked their home as being different, separate, from the homes of the Egyptians. Third, in a very real sense, it was what set them free from their slavery to Pharaoh. Look at verse 33. Because of how horrible this plague was, Pharaoh finally relented and not only allowed Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt to freedom, but the Egyptians hurried them on their way. Fourth, it was the blood of the lamb that secured their inheritance. In a sense this happened on two levels. It set them on their journey to the land that God had promised to Abraham as an inheritance for his offspring. But also look at verses 35-36. As they leave Egypt, the Israelites receive gifts of gold, silver, and clothing from the Egyptians that they would need for their journey. Remember, they had been slaves and probably were living in poverty in Egypt. These gifts would provide for their needs as they journeyed to the Promised Land, the place of their true inheritance.

In order to be saved from this plague, the Israelites had to have faith—faith that led to obedience. They had to believe that they would be spared by placing the blood of the lamb on their doorframes, but their belief had to lead them to obedience. If they just believed but never followed through by actually painting the doorframe, they would have faced the same plague that fell on the Egyptians.

The Passover was a powerful sign to both the Egyptians and the Israelites, but it is an even more powerful sign to us. It is through faith in the Blood of the Lamb that we are saved from death.

Romans 5:8-9 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!

It is through faith in the Blood of the Lamb that we are brought out of slavery to sin and into an eternal inheritance that can never be shaken.

1 Peter 1:3-5 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

<u>First Catechism</u>	<u>Westminster Shorter Catechism</u>
Question 67. What did this sacrifice represent? Christ, the Lamb of God, who would come to die for sinners.	Q. 36. What benefits in this life accompany or flow from justification, adoption and sanctification? The benefits in this life which accompany or flow from justification, adoption and sanctification are: assurance of God’s love,[a] peace of conscience,[b] joy in the Holy Spirit,[c] progress in holiness,[d] and perseverance in it to this life’s end.[e] [a]. Rom 5:5 [b]. Rom 5:1 [c]. Rom 14:17 [d]. 2 Pet 3:18 [e]. Php 1:6; 1 Pet 1:5

Question 1. What do we need to be rescued from? Can we rescue ourselves?

Question 2. Why can God pass over the sins of His people and rescue them from eternal death?

Question 3. Do you have faith in the Blood of the Lamb? Does your faith lead to obedience?

It is clear that God wanted Israel to always remember what God had done for them by leading them out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. One way they were to remember was by celebrating the Passover, but here in this chapter we see another way that God called them to remember as well. It was by the consecrating (giving to God) the firstborn of their flocks and their homes. In each family, the firstborn male child was to be set apart as belonging to the Lord to be used in service to the Lord. In verses 14-16, God tells the Israelites that He is commanding them to do this so that they will never forget that it was God who brought them out of Egypt. But while the animals that were given were to be sacrificed as an offering to the Lord, the firstborn sons, were to be redeemed (bought back). This was very different from many of the pagan cultures who offered child sacrifices to their gods.

This law was still in effect when Jesus was born.

Luke 2:21-24 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived. When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

Stop and think about that. Why did God's own Son have to be given over to God? Paul tells us in:

Galatians 4:4-5 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

These words that Paul writes, not only remind us that Jesus, God's Son, became like us, they also remind us why he came: to redeem us, so that we could become sons. As you think about how all this ties together you see a very powerful picture that develops. The redemption of the firstborn by the Israelites wasn't just so they would always remember; it also serves as a very powerful Old Testament picture of what God was going to do with his own Son. The Israelites were commanded by God to give their firstborn sons over to him, and then they were allowed to redeem them, so they would not have to be sacrificed. But God gave his firstborn son over to us, just so he could be sacrificed, in order that we could be redeemed and become children of God.

<u>First Catechism</u>	<u>Westminster Shorter Catechism</u>
Question 66. Before Christ came, how did believers show their faith? By offering the sacrifices God required.	Q. 1. What is the chief purpose for which man is made? The chief purpose for which man is made is to glorify God,[a] and to enjoy him for ever.[b] [a]. Psa 86:9; Isa 60:21; Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 6:20; 1 Cor 10:31; Rev 4:11 [b]. Psa 16:5-11; Psa 144:15; Isa 12:2; Luk 2:10; Phil 4:4; Rev 21:3-4

Question 1. Why does God command His people to "remember" His work of salvation? What has He given us to help us not forget? How can we encourage one another to "remember"?

Question 2. If we have been purchased by the blood of Christ, then who are we to now live for? How can you glorify God with your life?

The Red Sea crossing gives us some very powerful insights into the God we worship. Today we will look at just one that we find in verses 4, 17, and 18. As we look at these verses, we see that God's purpose in all of this is that He would gain glory. But what does that really mean? Sometimes when we read verses like this we fall into our own human thinking and think that God is a self-centered egotist always worried that He gets the glory. But before we think that we should remember what the word glory really means as it is used in the Bible. The Hebrew word for glory means that something is heavy or weighty—it has importance. When you think about who God is—the creator and sustainer of our lives—is there anything or anyone more important than Him? Is there anything that should carry more weight than He does in our lives? God's desire for His glory is really for our benefit—that we recognize His absolute importance in our lives. Isn't that really what God is trying to accomplish through this Red Sea crossing? Isn't He trying to get Israel's attention, and make sure that they know that He is the true and living God that should be the center of their very existence? Now, just as God gave the Israelites the evidence that they needed to make God the center of their existence by bringing Israel from death to life through the Red Sea crossing, shouldn't the way that Christ has brought us from death to life through the cross do the same for us?

Just a quick side note: this event clearly did make an impression on both Israel (it's mentioned over and over again in the Old Testament), but also in the nations that they would soon drive out of the Promised Land. Forty years later, when Israel is finally ready to enter the land and they send spies into Jericho, this is what Rahab, a resident of Jericho, says to the spies:

Joshua 2:9-10 "I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt

The cross does the same for us. The cross was the means by which Jesus was glorified.

John 12:23-24 Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."

New City Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
Question 6. How Can We Glorify God? We glorify God by enjoying him, loving him, trusting him, and by obeying his will, commands, and law.	Q. 34. Why do you call him "our Lord"? A. Because— not with gold or silver, but with his precious blood— ¹ he has set us free from sin and from the tyranny of the devil, ² and has bought us, body and soul, to be his very own. ³ 1 1 Pet. 1:18-19 2 Col. 1:13-14; Heb. 2:14-15 3 1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Tim. 2:5-6

Question 1. What are some things you have tried to find glory in before? As we look at the cross and think of the sacrifice that Christ has made for us, is there anything else we should glory in? Is there anything else that should even begin to compete to be the center of our lives? Read Galatians 6:14.

Yesterday we saw that all of this drama at the edge Red Sea took place so that God would be glorified, both in Israel and in the entire world, and we saw the importance of Christ being the center of our lives. Today as we consider another aspect of this same account, we can see why we need Christ to be the center of our lives. As the Israelites left Egypt, it is clear that they had no clue where they were going. They needed a leader to show them the way—to guide them to their new home. Moses was a great leader, but they needed someone greater. In verses 20-22 of chapter 13, we see who was leading them—it was the LORD (Yahweh), himself. By day the LORD appeared in front of them as a cloud. The cloud was not only a visible form for them to follow, but it also shaded them from the scorching desert sun.

Psalm 121:5-6 The LORD watches over you-- the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.

At night they were led by a pillar of fire, and once again this was not just a visible form for them to follow, it also provided light in the darkness, and heat to warm them from the cold night air of the desert.

But this pillar of cloud and fire didn't just lead the Israelites, it also defended them and protected them as the Egyptians prepared to attack them. Imagine how the Israelites felt as they stood on the banks of the Red Sea with nowhere to run and nowhere to hide and the Egyptians coming ever closer. They were unarmed and defenseless against the most powerful army of its day. But look at verses 19 and 20, just when it seems that all hope is lost, the angel of God, and the pillar of fire moved from in front of the Israelites to the rear of the Israelites. All night long, the angel and the pillar shielded them from the Egyptian army. In fact, verse 20 tells us that the pillar brought darkness to the side of the Egyptians and light to the side of the Israelites—light that would allow them to prepare to move when God told them to cross over.

In a very real way, the pillar of cloud and fire points us to the work of Christ. Jesus is the one who leads us on our spiritual journey to the Promised Land of our eternal rest. In fact, the writer of Hebrews calls Jesus the forerunner who has gone before us and entered the inner sanctuary of heaven—the very throne room of God.

Hebrews 6:19-20 We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

But Jesus doesn't just lead us to heaven, he protects and defends us all along the way.

Romans 8:31-39 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
Question 75. Why do you need Christ as your king? Because I am weak and helpless.	Q. 51. How does this glory of Christ our head benefit us? A. First, through his Holy Spirit he pours out gifts from heaven upon us his members. ¹ Second, by his power he defends us and keeps us safe from all enemies. ² 1 Acts 2:33; Eph. 4:7-12 2 Ps. 110:1-2; John 10:27-30; Rev. 19:11-16

Question 1. How do we have assurance in Christ that God is with us? Do those who are not in Christ have any true assurance in their life? Who can you pray for today that they may come to know assurance in Christ?

As Moses stretches out his hand, the water of the sea parts and the Israelites walk across on dry ground, then Moses stretches out his hand again and the water sweeps the Egyptian army away. The Israelites were free. They crossed over from slavery to freedom, and from what seemed to be certain death to new life. Paul uses the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites to express truths concerning our salvation through the outstretched arms of Jesus Christ on the cross.

1 Corinthians 10:1-2 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

What Paul is saying is that all those Israelites who crossed the Red Sea on dry ground became identified with Moses. They became part of a new nation—the nation of Israel. Once they crossed the sea, they were no longer part of the Kingdom of Egypt; they had been baptized into a new kingdom, the Kingdom of Israel, with a new hope and new future.

The same is true for us. Through Christ’s outstretched arms on the cross we leave the kingdom of Satan, we leave our bondage to sin and death, and we are baptized into a new kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, and a new life.

Romans 6:2-11 We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
Question 41. What is this change of heart called? The new birth, or regeneration.	Q. 31. Why is he called “Christ,” meaning “anointed”? A. Because he has been ordained by God the Father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit ¹ to be our chief prophet and teacher ² who fully reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our deliverance; ³ our only high priest ⁴ who has delivered us by the one sacrifice of his body, ⁵ and who continually pleads our cause with the Father; ⁶ and our eternal king ⁷ who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who guards us and keeps us in the freedom he has won for us. ⁸ 1 Luke 3:21-22; 4:14-19 (Isa. 61:1); Heb. 1:9 (Ps. 45:7) 2 Acts 3:22 (Deut. 18:15) 3 John 1:18; 15:15 4 Heb. 7:17 (Ps. 110:4) 5 Heb. 9:12; 10:11-14 6 Rom. 8:34; Heb. 9:24 7 Matt. 21:5 (Zech. 9:9) 8 Matt. 28:18-20; John 10:28; Rev. 12:10-11

Question 1. Was it “right” for God to destroy Pharaoh and his army? What does this tell us about those who do not place their trust in Him, but rather choose to reject and rebel against God?

Question 2. How does this passage further teach us about there being only two kingdoms in this world? How do you know which kingdom you are serving?

Question 3. What assurance and joy can we find in God’s kingdom?

In many ways, the people of Israel are an Old Testament picture of our lives today, and there is much we can learn about ourselves as we consider their wilderness journey to the Promised Land. As you read this passage, there is one thing that stands out, and it is the way the people of Israel complained about what God was doing. They are just days into their journey, just days from seeing God's miracles in the plagues against Pharaoh and Egypt, just days from seeing the Red Sea part so they could walk across on dry land. God was visibly in their presence in the pillar of smoke and fire that went before them. The pillar of fire is leading them to a new home in the Promised Land—a land that is flowing with milk and honey. But even with all of that, they start to complain at the first sign of trouble. First, there is no water, and then the food runs out. What is their first reaction? Look at verse 3 of chapter 16. Their first reaction is to complain, and not only to complain, but to desire to go back to Egypt. In fact, they make the statement that they would rather have food to eat as slaves in Egypt than to have freedom and a land of their own as they deal with these trials in the wilderness.

Now stop and think about our spiritual journey. If you are a Christian, a miracle has occurred in your life. You have been raised from death to life through the work of the Holy Spirit and the power of the blood of Christ.

Ephesians 2:1-5 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved.

Just as God freed Israel from the slavery in Egypt, Jesus has freed us from our slavery to sin.

Romans 6:6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin

Like the Israelites, we are also on our way to the Promised Land.

Revelation 21:3-4 "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

We too are led by the presence of God in our lives.

Romans 8:14 those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Ephesians 1:13-14 Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.

But unfortunately, we are also like the Israelites in one other way. We tend to complain when we go into our own wilderness. In our own way we too desire to go back to Egypt. How often do we look at the world and wish we could be more like them? Just as Israel was called to walk by faith, so are we.

Hebrews 10:35-39 So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

New City Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>Question 37. How Does the Holy Spirit Help Us?</p> <p>The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, comforts us, guides us, gives us spiritual gifts and the desire to obey God; and he enables us to pray and to understand God's Word.</p>	<p>Q. 1. What is your only comfort in life and in death?</p> <p>A. That I am not my own,¹ but belong— body and soul, in life and in death—² to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.³ He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood,⁴ and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.⁵ He also watches over me in such a way⁶ that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven;⁷ in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.⁸ Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life⁹ and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.¹⁰</p> <p>1 1 Cor. 6:19-20 2 Rom. 14:7-9 3 1 Cor. 3:23; Titus 2:14 4 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 1 John 1:7-9; 2:2 5 John 8:34-36; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 John 3:1-11 6 John 6:39-40; 10:27-30; 2 Thess. 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:5 7 Matt. 10:29-31; Luke 21:16-18 8 Rom. 8:28 9 Rom. 8:15-16; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14 10 Rom. 8:1-17</p>

Question 1. What are some specific things you tend to complain about? Have you repented of those times?

Question 2. How did God show His faithfulness and kindness to the Israelites? How has He with you?

Question 3. It is easy to see Israel's sin, but who has the same sinful heart?

It is estimated that there were well over 1 million Israelites that were part of the exodus from Egypt. The food that they brought with them soon ran out, and in the wilderness there wasn't much food to be found. In some ways it is understandable that as they got hungry, they would complain and grumble and wonder where their next meal was going to come from. Wouldn't we tend to do the same if we were in their shoes? But as always, God had a plan for how He was going to feed them. God's plan was to literally rain bread down from heaven. It fell like dew every morning, except for the Sabbath, and for forty years it sustained them as they journeyed in the wilderness. In fact, as you read the Book of Joshua, the manna stopped the day they entered the Promised Land. This bread from heaven sustained them physically until they entered the Promised Land.

In John's Gospel, Jesus connects himself to this bread from heaven. After Jesus miraculously fed over 5,000 people with just five loaves of bread and two small fish, the very next day the crowds came and clamored for him to do it again. After all, who doesn't like to get a free lunch?

John 6:30-35 So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

Just as Israel had to completely depend on God for their physical survival as they wandered in the desert, we also must depend completely on Christ for our spiritual well-being. The forgiveness and the righteousness that he gives us by way of the cross are the only hope we have. The more we feed on what Christ has done for us on the cross, the more nourished our spirits will be. Just as Israel had no hope for survival without the bread from heaven, we have no hope for eternity without Jesus—the Bread of Life.

<u>New City Catechism</u>	<u>Westminster Shorter Catechism</u>
<p>Question 42. How is the Word of God to be Read and Heard?</p> <p>With diligence, preparation, and prayer; so that we may accept it with faith, store it in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.</p>	<p>Q. 89. How is the Word of God made effective to salvation?</p> <p>The Spirit of God makes the reading but especially the preaching of the Word, an effective means of convincing and converting sinners, and building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, to salvation.[a]</p> <p>[a]. Neh 8:8-9; Acts 20:32; Rom 10:14-17; 2 Tim 3:15-17</p>

Question 1. What does it mean to "feed on Christ"? How can we daily feed on Him? Why do we need daily nourishment?

Question 2. How as a family can you actively recognize and thank God for His provision found in Christ?

As we come to this next account in the book of Exodus, we see yet another picture of Christ. We'll revisit this picture in greater detail when we come to Numbers 20, which is the second time Moses was told by God to bring water out of a rock. Both of these instances are important Old Testament stories because they point us to pictures of Christ. In this instance, the people of Israel are thirsty, and are once again complaining. To satisfy their thirst, God tells Moses to approach the rock at Horeb and strike it with his rod. As Moses does this, water flows from the rock, and not just a trickle of water, but a great gush of water that was enough to quench the thirst of over one million Israelites. It was a miraculous, inexhaustible flow of water that quenched their thirst.

Once again, we can see a clear connection between this event and Jesus, because the New Testament makes the connection for us.

1 Corinthians 10:1-4 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

What does Paul mean when he says Jesus is the spiritual rock that accompanied them? In the Psalms, David uses this metaphor to describe God:

Psalm 62:5-6 Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.

Think about the agitated state the Israelites must have been in as they became more and more thirsty. Think how hope would have seemed to have evaporated. And then think about how all of that changed when Moses struck the rock and water poured out. Hope returned, calm returned, and they were saved from death. Where does our rest come from? Isn't it from Jesus and what Jesus did on the cross? Isn't our hope found in what Christ has done for us? Jesus is the rock of our salvation. Jesus is the rock that was struck for us, and there, on the cross when he was struck, living water poured out of him to refresh our souls.

John 4:10-14 "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."...."Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

<u>New City Catechism</u>	<u>Heidelberg Catechism</u>
Question 20. Who is the Redeemer? The only Redeemer is the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, in whom God became man and bore the penalty for sin himself.	Q. 43. What further benefit do we receive from Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross? A. By Christ's power our old selves are crucified, put to death, and buried with him, ¹ so that the evil desires of the flesh may no longer rule us, ² but that instead we may offer ourselves as a sacrifice of gratitude to him. ³ 1 Rom. 6:5-11; Col. 2:11-12 2 Rom. 6:12-14 3 Rom. 12:1; Eph. 5:1-2

Question 1. Are you finding your rest in Jesus alone? Besides Jesus, where are you tempted to often find your rest and/or righteousness?

Question 2. Why did judgement have to fall before life is given? How is this a picture of the cross?

This would be Israel's first battle as a nation. Can you imagine the anticipation and fear as they got word that the Amalekites were gathering to attack them? Would they be victorious? Moses does his best to make sure that Israel will be victorious. He goes up on a hill overlooking the battlefield and he raises his hands to heaven. What was the significance of Moses doing this? It was an act of prayer, an act of relying on God alone for the victory. As long as Moses' arms were stretched out in prayer the battle went for Israel, as his arms grew tired and began to drop to his sides, Israel began to experience defeat. Just as Moses' stretched out his arms to bring his people victory, Jesus stretched out his arms for us. His outstretched arms on the cross gave us victory over Satan, sin, and death.

1 Corinthians 15:54-58 "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

As Israel saw their leader with his arms outstretched to heaven, they were encouraged to stand firm and fight the good fight. As we see Jesus with his arms outstretched on the cross for us, we too must be encouraged to stand firm in our faith and fight the good fight.

1 Corinthians 15:57-58 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you.

Just as Moses interceded for his people to bring them to victory, Jesus intercedes for us to bring us to victory.

Romans 8:33-34 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
Question 57. How does God sanctify you? God makes me more and more holy in heart and conduct.	Q. 32. But why are you called a Christian? A. Because by faith I am a member of Christ ¹ and so I share in his anointing. ² I am anointed to confess his name, ³ to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks, ⁴ to strive with a free conscience against sin and the devil in this life, ⁵ and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for eternity. ⁶ 1 1 Cor. 12:12-27 2 Acts 2:17 (Joel 2:28); 1 John 2:27 3 Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:9-10; Heb. 13:15 4 Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9 5 Gal. 5:16-17; Eph. 6:11; 1 Tim. 1:18-19 6 Matt. 25:34; 2 Tim. 2:12

Question 1. Who is our war against? What does it mean that we have victory? What does it mean to fight the good fight?

Question 2. How does looking to Jesus stretched upon the cross help us overcome evil?

As you read today's reading, you might get the impression that getting in good with God is all about what we do. After all, look at verse 5, "if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth." That sure sounds like conditional love on God's part. "If you do this, then you will be my people." If that were true, then do you realize what that means for your life? You are only as good as your last performance. If you are good, then you are in; and if you are bad, then you are out. Unfortunately, that is how most people view Christianity. But think about what is really happening here. Don't just look at verse 5, look at verse 4. Look at verses 1 and 2 of chapter 20. The obedience that God is calling Israel to is based on what God has already done for them. God brought them out of Egypt, out of slavery. He has carried them on eagle's wings through the wilderness. He has loved them before they have done a thing for Him. Isn't that the Gospel?

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Before we do anything, God sets His love and affection upon us.

1 John 3:1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Israel was made God's chosen possession, not because of what they had done or would do, but simply because God chose to lavish His love upon them. The same is true for us. You are not saved and given eternal life, because of what you do, or who you are. You are saved because, for reasons all His own, God chose to love you, and through the blood of Christ, to adopt you and bring you into His family as His child. Now, because you are part of the family, God calls you to obedience, just as He calls Israel to obedience here in chapter 19 and 20. But it is to be an obedience based on gratitude for what God has already done for them.

Through His outstretched hand and mighty arm, God has redeemed Israel out of slavery and made them His own, now He is calling them to live out what He has made them to be—His prized possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In the New Testament, Peter uses this exact same language to describe who we are in Jesus.

1 Peter 2: 9 – 10 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Notice Peter doesn't say we are trying to become this; he says we already are these things and notice why. It is all because we have received God's mercy.

<u>First Catechism</u>	<u>Westminster Shorter Catechism</u>
Question 77. Why should we obey the Ten Commandments? Because God is our Creator, Savior and King.	Q. 44. What does the preface to the Ten Commandments teach us? The preface to the Ten Commandments teaches us that because God is the LORD and our God and Redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all his commandments.[a] [a]. Luk 1:74-75; 1 Pet 1:14-19

Question 1. How has God equipped you to serve His kingdom?

Question 2. Search the motives of your heart. Why do you serve God and the church? What are some wrong motives to serve? What are the right motives?

As you read today's reading, you see the problem with God. Well actually, it is not the problem with God, it is the problem with us. It is a problem that we often times overlook and minimize, because we lose sight of two things. First, God's holiness, and second, our sinfulness. Because of these two things, we cannot approach God. Do you see what God does here? As God comes down to meet with Moses at the top of Mt. Sinai, He orders Moses to erect a barrier at the base of Mt. Sinai. Why? Do you remember back in Exodus 3 and the account there of Moses and the burning bush? God told Moses to take off his sandals, because the ground around the bush had become holy ground. What made the ground holy? The presence of the Lord. The same thing is happening here at Mt. Sinai. Even though we often lose sight of it, as sinful people we cannot be in the presence of God, because God will not allow His holiness to be tainted with our sinfulness. But also because we cannot stand to be in the presence of a Holy God. It would literally be our undoing.

Isaiah 6: 1 – 5 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

As long as we can compare ourselves to other sinful beings, we can feel okay about ourselves, or maybe even really good about ourselves. But the moment we step anywhere near the presence of God, we see the truth about ourselves. We see how tainted we are by sin. We see how even our good works are as filthy rags in God's presence (Isaiah 64: 6). How can we approach a holy God when even our best works seem to be nothing more than filthy rags?

Listen to what David wrote in Psalm 24:

Psalm 24: 3 – 4 Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart

We may want to flatter ourselves and think that we are that person, that we have clean hands and a pure heart, but listen to how Paul describes each of us:

Romans 3: 10 – 23 "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.".....There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Just like Israel at the foot of Mt. Sinai, we cannot approach a holy God in our own righteousness, because we have none. But there is one who came who had clean hands a pure heart—Jesus, the Son of God. There is one who could ascend the mountain of the Lord, the one who ascended Mt. Calvary—Jesus, the Son of Man.

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>Question 108. Of what use are the Ten Commandments to you?</p> <p>They teach me what is pleasing to God, and how much I need a Savior.</p>	<p>Q. 115. Since no one in this life can obey the Ten Commandments perfectly, why does God want them preached so pointedly?</p> <p>A. First, so that the longer we live the more we may come to know our sinfulness and the more eagerly look to Christ for forgiveness of sins and righteousness.¹ Second, so that we may never stop striving, and never stop praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, to be renewed more and more after God's image, until after this life we reach our goal: perfection.²</p> <p>1 Ps. 32:5; Rom. 3:19-26; 7:7, 24-25; 1 John 1:9</p> <p>2 1 Cor. 9:24; Phil. 3:12-14; 1 John 3:1-3</p>

Question 1. How are we made righteous? How can we ascend the mountain of the Lord and live in the presence of a holy God?

Question 2. What do these commands teach us about God's character?

Question 3. How should God's commands lead us to a deeper worship of Him? How do they show us our inability to keep His commands and lead us to Christ?

God's law is a wonderful thing. Think what a mess our world would be if we didn't have it. Think what it would be like to live in a world where murder, or stealing, or even lying were perfectly permissible. God gave us the law to make the world we live in a better place. Even the fourth commandment (remember the Sabbath and keep it holy), that we seem to struggle with so much, is there for our good. If nothing else, we need a day to rest and recharge our batteries. The law is good, but we make it into a bad thing when we try to earn our righteousness through our own flawed obedience to it. Don't get the wrong impression, we should do our best to obey God's law, but we must never fall into the trap of thinking that somehow we can be righteous in God's sight simply through our efforts to obey God's law. Think what happens to us if we allow the law to become our righteousness. We will either become puffed up with pride that we can keep it better than others, or we will become inconsolably depressed at our failure to keep it as well as others do. The law brings order to our society, and it tells us how God wants us to live our lives, but the real purpose of the law is to show us how much we need Jesus.

Galatians 3:24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

The New Living Translation does a good job of explaining just what Paul is trying to teach us about the law.

Galatians 3:24 Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian and teacher to lead us until Christ came. So now, through faith in Christ, we are made right with God.

The law teaches us what true righteousness is, but even more than that it teaches us how much we need a savior. Jesus is that savior. He took on flesh, he was born under the law, just so that we could be saved from our own failure to keep the law.

Galatians 4:4-5 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

<u>First Catechism</u>	Heidelberg Catechism
Question 107. Can you keep the Ten Commandments perfectly? No. Since the fall of Adam, the only One who has been able to do this is Jesus.	Q. 114. But can those converted to God obey these commandments perfectly? A. No. In this life even the holiest have only a small beginning of this obedience. ¹ Nevertheless, with all seriousness of purpose, they do begin to live according to all, not only some, of God's commandments. ² 1 Eccles. 7:20; Rom. 7:14-15; 1 Cor. 13:9; 1 John 1:8-10 2 Ps. 1:1-2; Rom. 7:22-25; Phil. 3:12-16

Question 1. As a Christian, what purpose is God's law in your spiritual growth?

Question 2. As you grow as a Christian and more fully understand God's law and God's holiness, how will you understand your sinfulness? How will your understanding of needing a savior increase?

Jesus' answer to those who are questioning him about the law is brilliant. Rather than placing one of God's laws above another, Jesus captures the sum of the whole law in two concise statements that sum up the ten commandments in their entirety. The first four commandments deal with our relationship to God, and Jesus summed these up by saying that the first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all that we have and all that we are. Stop and think about it this way: if we are loving God with everything that we are, then there will be no other Gods before him, we won't misuse his name, we won't manufacture other gods to compete with him, and we will want to spend more than just one day a week with him. But in his explanation of what the greatest commandment was, Jesus didn't stop with just that. Jesus went on to say, "And the second is like it." One professor explains Jesus' explanation like this: "Commandment 1A is to love the Lord, and commandment 1B is to love others." As you think about the second table of the law, the last six commandments, they all deal with how we are to love other people, so Jesus' summary of the law, "To love your neighbor as yourself," is a very direct explanation and summary of those six laws.

It is easy for us to know the law and to talk about the law, but living it out in our lives is a completely different thing. But as we look at Jesus' life in the gospels, it is clear that he didn't just talk about the law, he actually lived it out like no one else has ever done or could ever do. How else do you explain the cross, except to say that Jesus was living out commandment 1A? Jesus went to the cross because he loved the Father with all of his being, and as a result desired to do the Father's will above anything else, even if it meant dying on the cross.

John 6:37-39 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

How else do you explain the cross, other than the fact that Jesus was living out commandment 1B? He went to the cross because he loved his neighbor (that's us), more than himself.

John 13:1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

John 15:12-13 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

Because of Jesus' perfect obedience to the law, he is the spotless Lamb of God, our perfect sacrifice of atonement.

Hebrews 2:17 - 18 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

<u>First Catechism</u>	<u>Heidelberg Catechism</u>
Question 80. What do the Ten Commandments teach? To love God with all my heart, and my neighbor as myself.	Q. 93. How are these commandments divided? A. Into two tables. The first has four commandments, teaching us how we ought to live in relation to God. The second has six commandments, teaching us what we owe our neighbor. ¹ 1 Matt. 22:37-39

Question 1. We are all worshippers... whom or what do you worship and treasure?

Question 2. What are some practical examples of what it looks like to love God and love your neighbor? How can we look to Jesus to see how to reflect what this looks like?

This law that God gave to Moses and the Israelites shows us just how far we have fallen short of God's standard. Although sometimes we fool ourselves into thinking we are keeping the law much better than we are. In the verses we read today, Jesus does three things. He reminds us that the law is still in effect (verses 17-19). The fact that Jesus has come doesn't do away with the law. Jesus also explains the depths of the law (verses 20-28). For example, he tells us that the 6th commandment against murder isn't just about taking someone else's life; it's about hating them to the point where you wish they would die. And the 7th commandment, forbidding adultery, isn't just about a physical act; it's about the things that go on in our private thought life.

Based on Jesus' commentary on the law who of us isn't guilty of great sin? We are all guilty and we all stand condemned.

Romans 3:22-23 There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

But because of Christ's obedience to the law and Christ's death on the cross, we are declared to be righteous in God's sight. How can that be? Because of the third thing Jesus tells us about the law in these verses. He didn't come to abolish the law, but to fulfill the law (verse 17). And because Jesus has done that for us, our righteousness can exceed that of the Pharisees (verse 20). In Jesus' day, the Pharisees were the religious professionals. It was thought that no one kept the law like they did. If men were to be judged against the law, surely the Pharisees' righteousness would set the standard. But what does Jesus say in verse 20? Even their "supposed righteousness" isn't good enough. We need a righteousness that exceeds their righteousness in order to see the Kingdom of Heaven. Where do we find righteousness like that? Jesus!

Romans 3:21-24 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
Question 54. What is meant by the atonement? Christ satisfied God's justice by his suffering and death as a substitute for sinners.	Q. 61. Why do you say that through faith alone you are righteous? A. Not because I please God by the worthiness of my faith. It is because only Christ's satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness make me righteous before God, ¹ and because I can accept this righteousness and make it mine in no other way than through faith. ² 1 1 Cor. 1:30-31 2 Rom. 10:10; 1 John 5:10-12

Question 1. Discuss times when you tend to compare your sinfulness to the sins of others around you. Why is it wrong to do that? How does a right understanding of our sin change how we treat our neighbor? How does a right understanding of our sin change how we worship God?

In today's reading, Jesus takes us straight to the heart of the law. It is relatively easy to look like you are doing a good job keeping the law (like this rich young ruler had apparently been doing), but as Jesus talks to this man, he exposes what the man really loves. In fact, as Jesus talks with this man, Jesus exposes the fact that this man is not really a law keeper but a law breaker. For his whole life, this man has kept a scorecard of how good he is. The sad truth is his judgment of his goodness is based on how he sees himself in comparison to the rest of the world. By all appearances, he is a good man and a keeper of the law. But just like with the Pharisees, Jesus was able to see past the external appearance and into the heart of this man.

Matthew 23:27-28 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

On the outside this man looked beautiful, but what about the inside? What was really in his heart? When Jesus tells him to sell all he has and give it to the poor and then come and follow him, what does the man do? He walks away sad. He wants eternal life, he wants the Kingdom of Heaven, but he wants his stuff more. What does his failure to do what Jesus told him to do expose about his ability to keep the law? Doesn't his response to what Jesus said indicate that he wasn't really keeping the law at all? Doesn't his response show that he loved his money more than God? If that is the case, then is he really loving the Lord with all his heart, soul, and mind? Doesn't his response also show that he loved his money more than his neighbor? This man had clearly fooled himself into thinking he was better than he really was. He loved and needed his money more than he loved and needed Jesus. Why would that be so? Because his self-righteousness that was based in his own view of how well he kept the law, kept him from seeing his need for a savior.

When we get down to the heart of the law, we see that there can be nothing that we love more than God, and nothing other than God that we love more than our neighbors. The heart of the law exposes our hearts; the heart of the law exposes the fact that we are far worse sinners than we ever dared to dream that we are and the heart of the law exposes just how desperately we need a savior.

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>Question 85. What does the first commandment teach you?</p> <p>To worship the true God, and him only.</p>	<p>Q. 94. What does the Lord require in the first commandment?</p> <p>A. That I, not wanting to endanger my own salvation, avoid and shun all idolatry,¹ sorcery, superstitious rites,² and prayer to saints or to other creatures.³ That I rightly know the only true God,⁴ trust him alone,⁵ and look to God for every good thing⁶ humbly⁷ and patiently,⁸ and love,⁹ fear,¹⁰ and honor¹¹ God with all my heart. In short, that I give up anything rather than go against God's will in any way.¹²</p> <p>1 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 10:5-14; 1 John 5:21 2 Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:9-12 3 Matt. 4:10; Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9 4 John 17:3 5 Jer. 17:5, 7 6 Ps. 104:27-28; James 1:17 7 1 Pet. 5:5-6 8 Col. 1:11; Heb. 10:36 9 Matt. 22:37 (Deut. 6:5) 10 Prov. 9:10; 1 Pet. 1:17 11 Matt. 4:10 (Deut. 6:13) 12 Matt. 5:29-30; 10:37-39</p>

Question 1. As the law exposes these things to us, where does it drive you? Read Romans 5:8 and John 15:13.

Are you experiencing the depths of Christ's love?

Question 2. As you see and understand your sin and Christ's love, how will you be able to love God and your neighbor more?

It is hard to say that one passage of Scripture is more important than others, and in fact, it can be downright dangerous since it is all the Word of God. However, having said that, this is one of the most important passages in all of Scripture! Consider it carefully. Quoting from several different Old Testament passages (verses 10 -18), Paul makes the case that none of us are righteous in God's sight. We may fool ourselves, and we may even fool others, but we don't fool God. Paul goes on to tell us in verse 19 that because of the law and because of our sin, we will all face a day when God will call us to account, and he will have every right to pass judgment on us and pronounce a verdict of guilty against us (verse 20). As we stand before God, we will realize that we are not nearly as good as we think we are. In fact, rather than being declared righteous because of our ability to keep the law, we will all stand condemned because of our inability to keep the law.

But then look what Paul says starting in verse 21. There is a righteousness that we can have that doesn't come to us by works or our ability to keep the law, but by faith in Christ alone. In spite of the fact that we are all sinners, who deserve to be condemned to hell (verse 23), because of our own inability to keep the law, there is still a way for us to be declared righteous in God's sight, and it is through faith in Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross. This is such an important point for us to understand, and one that we so easily forget. So often we just think of the cross as the way our sins are forgiven, but that is only half the story. We need forgiveness, but we also need righteousness. The only way we can ever stand in the presence of God is if we are declared to be righteous in His sight.

Psalm 1:5-6 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Christ's death on the cross makes a way for us to come into the presence of God.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God

Look again at Romans 3: 23-24. Even though we are sinners, there is a way for us to be justified (made righteous in God's sight), and it is through Christ's death on the cross. Christ's death on the cross doesn't just give us forgiveness for our sins, it also gives us Christ's perfect record of righteousness as our own. We aren't just forgiven; we are made completely right in God's sight. Not because of our obedience or our ability to keep the law, but because of Jesus' perfect obedience.

Galatians 2:21 - 3:1 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!

We must never fall into the deadly trap of thinking our righteousness comes from our own ability to keep the law. We must never think that Jesus died just to forgive our sins, but now it is up to us to earn our righteousness. Righteousness comes through faith in Christ, and that is why Christ must be the only thing of worth in our lives.

Philippians 3:7-9 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 61. What does it mean to believe in Christ? To trust in Christ alone for my salvation.	Q. 86. What is faith in Jesus Christ? Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace[a] by which we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation as he is freely offered to us in the gospel.[b] [a]. Eph 2:8-9; cf. Rom 4:16 [b]. John 20:30-31; Gal 2:15-16; Php 3:3-11

Question 1. Discuss the universal need for salvation from sin. How should this motivate us to spread the Gospel?

As God gives Moses the instructions for building the Tabernacle, He makes a very specific point to tell Moses to build it exactly according to the instructions that God had given him. In fact, to make his point, God repeats this instruction twice (Exodus 25: 9 and Exodus 26: 30). The Tabernacle wasn't to be something that the Israelites just slapped together however they felt like it. It was to be made precisely the way God instructed it to be made. If you were to take the time to read all of the details about the Tabernacle and its furnishings in Exodus 25: 1 – 31: 11, you would see that God cares about even what would seem to be the very smallest details. He not only tells them what to make, but He also tells them exactly what they are to make it from, how they are to make it, and how they are to make use of it. Why would God care so much about such seemingly small details? The first, and most obvious reason, is because this Tabernacle was going to be the place where God would make His dwelling (25:8). Imagine, building a home for God to live in. Obviously that task would require detailed instructions and the utmost care in construction. The word sanctuary that appears in Exodus 25: 8 literally means “holy place”—a place that is set aside for a special purpose. The Tabernacle wasn't just any old ordinary place; it was the dwelling place of God.

As John began to write his Gospel, he starts by talking about who Jesus is, and he says something very, very interesting in verse 14 of chapter 1.

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

It is a powerful thought to think that Jesus is God made flesh, but John doesn't stop with that. John also says that Jesus came and made his dwelling among us. The Greek word that is translated as “dwelling” in our Bibles is the word skhno,w (skenoo). What is interesting about this word “skenoo” is that it is the Greek word for Tabernacle. Think about the significance of this. In Exodus, God had people build a sanctuary for Him to dwell in, but then in the New Testament, Jesus is made like us so that he can come and dwell with us. In the Old Testament, the glory of God resided behind a curtain in the Most Holy Place; in the New Testament, the glory of God comes and walks among us. Jesus didn't commute from heaven, but he moved right in and lived among us. He came and dwelt among us; he became like us, but without sin, so that he could take our punishment and give us his righteousness. Because Christ has done that for us, our lives become the place where the Spirit of God dwells.

1 Corinthians 3:16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple (the temple replaced the tabernacle as the dwelling place of God during King Solomon's reign) and that God's Spirit lives in you?

Imagine that! Because of Christ, we have gone from God living behind a curtain in the tabernacle, to God making his dwelling among us (Christ), to God making his dwelling in us (The Holy Spirit).

New City Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 20. Who is the Redeemer? The only Redeemer is the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, in whom God became man and bore the penalty for sin himself.	Q. 21. Who is the Redeemer of God's elect? The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ,[a] who, being the eternal Son of God[b] became man,[c] and so was and continues to be God and man, in two distinct natures and one person for ever.[d] [a]. John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5-6 [b]. Psa 2:7; Mat 3:17; Mat 17:5; John 1:18 [c]. Isa 9:6; Mat 1:23; John 1:14; Gal 4:4 [d]. Acts 1:11; Heb 7:24-25

Question 1. How does God desiring to dwell among His people impact your understanding of His presence in your life? How does it impact how you think of the Church (the body of Christ- other believers)?

Yesterday we saw that part of the reason why God gave such explicit directions for the construction of the Tabernacle was because it would be the place where He dwelt among his people. But there is also a second reason that doesn't really become obvious to us until the writer of Hebrews explains it to us. The Tabernacle was the place where the High Priest carried out his work, and the most important part of that work was to offer sacrifices that would atone for the sins of the people. In the Book of Hebrews, the writer of Hebrews connects Jesus, in a very powerful way, to the work that was carried out in the tabernacle. In fact, the writer of Hebrews calls Jesus our Great High Priest, and in the verses we read today, the writer of Hebrews tells us that as our Great High Priest, Jesus is still at work today in the heavenly tabernacle.

Look at verse 5, the writer of Hebrews gives us the reason why God told Moses to be so precise in the construction of the tabernacle—it was the earthly representation of the heavenly reality. In other words, the earthly tabernacle was a copy of the heavenly dwelling of God. The writer of Hebrews goes on to tell us that the work the priests did in the tabernacle was also a representation of the work Christ would do for us.

There are some very interesting things the writer of Hebrews tells us about this work that Christ is doing in the heavenly tabernacle. First, the writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus sat down at the right of the throne of God. This is not just a small detail. It is rich in meaning and significance. First, when someone sits down it indicates their work is done.

Hebrews 10:11-12 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest (Jesus) had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

Jesus' death on the cross is the final and ultimate sacrifice for sin. It is once and done. That is exactly what Jesus meant when he cried out on the cross, "It is finished."

But furthermore, in the ancient near east culture, sitting at the right hand of a ruler was considered to be the ultimate position of power, authority and honor. So, when the writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, he is proclaiming that Jesus is King of Kings.

Ephesians 1:19-23 That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

But there is something else that should catch our eye that the writer of Hebrews says in verse 2 of today's reading. In verse 1, he told us Jesus is seated indicating his work is done, but in verse 2 the writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is also at work serving in the sanctuary (tabernacle) on our behalf. Why does Jesus need to continue to serve if his work is done? His sacrificial work is done, but day after day Jesus is interceding with the Father on our behalf serving as our advocate, defending us from Satan's accusations.

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 71. How is Christ your priest? Christ died for my sins and continues to pray for me.	Q. 25. How does Christ fill the office of a priest? Christ fills the office of a priest in his once offering up of himself to God as a sacrifice, to satisfy divine justice[a] and reconcile us to God;[b] and in making constant intercession for us.[c] [a]. Isa 53:1-12; Acts 8:32-35; Heb 9:26-28; Heb 10:12 [b]. Rom 5:10-11; 2 Cor 5:18; Col 1:21-22 [c]. Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25; Heb 9:24

Question 1. Read 1 John 2:1-2. What does it mean that Jesus is defending us, serving as our advocate? Since we know we have Jesus defending us from accusations, how can we live with a certain confidence?

Before we leave the tabernacle and go on to its furnishings, we should look at one more New Testament passage that makes use of the Greek word for tabernacle skhno,w (skenoo). In verse 15 of today's passage, John, the writer of Revelation, uses this word to describe a scene that he sees in his vision of heaven. In this scene, John sees a great multitude of people, dressed in white robes, praising God for the salvation they have been given through Christ. Through faith in what Christ has done on the cross, this great multitude has come through the Great Tribulation, and is now gathered around the throne of heaven, praising and serving God. What a great scene, but that is not the end of what John sees. Look at verse 15. John tells us that God will spread his tent (skhno,w) over them to protect them. As we are taken, by faith in Christ, from the tribulations of this life to eternal life, God will spread his tent over us. Our eternal dwelling place will be with God in his sanctuary.

Revelation 21:1-5 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

God's tabernacle will be our dwelling place. There will be no more tribulation, no more tears, no more death, no more sin.

2 Corinthians 5:1-7 Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight.

As we give up the earthly tent of our bodies, we come under the shelter of God's tent for all of eternity.

<u>New City Catechism</u>	<u>Westminster Shorter Catechism</u>
<p>Question 52. What Hope Does Everlasting Life Hold for Us?</p> <p>It reminds us that this present fallen world is not all there is; soon we will live with and enjoy God forever in the new city, in the new heaven and the new earth, where we will be fully and forever freed from all sin and will inhabit renewed, resurrection bodies in a renewed, restored creation.</p>	<p>Q. 38. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?</p> <p>At the resurrection Christ will immediately raise up in glory all believers;[a] he will openly acknowledge and acquit them in the day of judgement,[b] graciously rewarding them according to their works of faith, and they will enter into the full enjoyment of God[c] for all eternity.[d]</p> <p>[a]. 1 Cor 15:42-43 [b]. Mat 25:33-34, 46 [c]. Rom 8:29; 1 John 3:2 [d]. Psa 16:11; 1 Thes 4:17</p>

Question 1. How does the scene described in this passage reflect the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan?

Question 2. What comfort and hope are there in the final redemptive victory? How can we be sure of the result and why?

As we turn our attention to the furnishings of the tabernacle, we see Jesus in each of these as well. The first furnishing that God told Moses to make for the tabernacle was the Ark of the Covenant. This chest contained the tablets of the law, Aaron’s rod that budded (Numbers 17), and a jar of manna (Hebrews 9:4). The cover of the chest was made of gold, and it was referred to as the Mercy Seat. Before we go any further, stop and think what a beautiful picture God gives us in all of this. There is the law, to be preserved inside the chest, but over the law—covering the law—is the Mercy Seat. God knew that because of our human weakness we could never measure up to the law’s demands, so God made a way for mercy to cover our transgressions against the law.

James 2:13 mercy triumphs over judgment.

But it is mercy that comes at a great cost, the blood of an innocent victim. As God gives mercy to us, His judgment is passed on to an innocent victim who stands in our place.

Once a year the High Priest would make atonement for the sins of the people, and he would take blood from the sacrifice and sprinkle it on the Mercy Seat to accomplish this. Clearly the Mercy Seat is a very powerful picture of Christ and what Christ would do on the cross. As the blood from the animal sacrifice was sprinkled on the Mercy Seat, sins were forgiven, and the wrath of God was turned away. Jesus, as the Lamb of God, was the perfect sacrifice for our sins. His blood turns away the wrath of God and makes atonement for our sins.

1 John 4:10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Jesus is the Ark of the Covenant. He is the presence of God with us. He is the fulfilment of the Law and the Bread of Life. Jesus is the Mercy Seat. His death in our place and his shed blood covers our transgression and sin against the Law of God.

New City Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
Question 25. Does Christ’s Death Mean All Our Sins Can Be Forgiven? Yes, because Christ’s death on the cross fully paid the penalty for our sin, God graciously imputes Christ’s righteousness to us as if it were our own and will remember our sins no more.	Q. 56. What do you believe concerning “the forgiveness of sins”? A. I believe that God, because of Christ’s satisfaction, will no longer remember any of my sins ¹ or my sinful nature which I need to struggle against all my life. ² Rather, by grace God grants me the righteousness of Christ to free me forever from judgment. ³ 1 Ps. 103:3-4, 10, 12; Mic. 7:18-19; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; 1 John 1:7; 2:2 2 Rom. 7:21-25 3 John 3:17-18; Rom. 8:1-2

Question 1. How did the furnishings of the tabernacle point to Jesus? How are all the furnishings centered around Jesus? Is your worship centered around Jesus?

Often, we read over the details concerning the furnishings in the temple, and we think very little about their significance. But each of these furnishings points us toward Jesus. In today's reading, we read about the Table of Presence and the showbread that is set out on the table. As you read about this bread you see there were always to be twelve loaves of it sitting on the table, and that each loaf represented the twelve tribes of Israel. In verse 30, God calls this showbread the "Bread of Presence," and that is exactly what this table and the bread were meant to communicate to Israel—God's presence in their lives—God's desire to have fellowship with them. Perhaps there is no greater act of fellowship than to sit down and share a meal together. The table and the bread were a picture of God's willingness to fellowship and have communion with His people. The table represented an invitation to share a meal as an extension of God's friendship toward Israel. God was willing for the Israelites to enter into His presence to fellowship with Him, and just as the bread was always present on the table, this invitation was always open.

When Jesus came the door to having fellowship with God was swung wide open so that all men could come and enjoy the presence of God in their lives. In fact, Jesus seemed to specialize in sharing meals with people that the religious society had long ago written off as being beyond all hope of ever entering the presence of God. But there they were sitting and eating and drinking with Jesus. Jesus ate with tax collectors, prostitutes, and the sinners of Jewish society. But this was more than just a gesture of friendship on earth.

Matthew 9:10-13 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Jesus came to call sinners to Him, make them right with God, so that they could enjoy everlasting fellowship with God.

John 6: 35, 49-50 "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. ... Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die."

God so desires our fellowship that He was willing to come to earth from heaven as our "bread of life" to give eternal life to all those who would partake in it. At the Last Supper Jesus described Himself as bread again:

Matthew 26: 26 "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.'"

We celebrate the Lord's Supper, or communion, to remember this important truth, the way to come into the presence of God is through the broken body of Christ—the bread of life. The day is coming when we will sit in the presence of God and share a meal with him. The Book of Revelation calls it the Wedding Supper of the Lamb.

Revelation 3: 20 "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

Revelation 19:9 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 138. What does the bread [in the Lord's Supper] represent? Christ's body sacrificed for our sins.	Q. 29. How are we made to share in the redemption purchased by Christ? We are made to share in the redemption purchased by Christ by the effective application of it to us by his Holy Spirit.[a] [a]. Tit 3:4-7

Question 1. How do God's people experience a relationship with Him today? Is your relationship with God solely personal or corporate?