

Israel was given the Promised Land by God as a free act of God’s grace, that is, they did nothing to earn the land in their own merit. But once God had shown them His grace and given them the land, God called them to obedience by living under His laws. As you read this passage, it becomes clear that the path to receiving God’s blessing in the Promised Land would lie in their willingness to obey God, and to love God with all of their hearts. After all that God had done for them, it was really the only rational thing for them to do, but as humans we don’t always behave in rational ways, do we?

God promised Israel that if they would live in obedience to Him and love Him, He would send the rains on the Promised Land at the right times, so that there would always be a bountiful harvest and the land would truly flow with milk and honey. The land itself was a free gift of God’s grace but the blessing the Israelites would enjoy in the land would be in direct proportion to their willingness to love, obey, and serve God.

In the same way our salvation is a free gift of God’s grace and not of works so that no man can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9), but the blessings we receive as a result of our salvation are directly tied to how we respond to the grace we have been shown. Jesus made it perfectly clear that the only rational response to the salvation we have been shown through the cross is for us to be willing to die to ourselves and follow (love, serve, obey) him.

Luke 9:23 "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Every day we are faced with a choice to either love ourselves or deny ourselves and love the one who died for our sins. The path to blessing in our new life in Christ is to love, serve, and obey Jesus with all of our lives. Jesus made it very clear that the only way we bear fruit in our lives (be blessed) is if we abide or remain in him.

John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>Question 5. Why are you to glorify God? Because he made me and takes care of me.</p>	<p>Q. 32. But why are you called a Christian? A. Because by faith I am a member of Christ¹ 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</p>

Question 1. What grace have we been shown in Christ? What obedience should flow from gratitude in our own lives?

Question 2. What is our Promised Land that we are looking forward to in faith?

Question 3. How are you loving, obeying, and serving God? What is your motive for doing so? When, recently, haven’t you been loving, obeying, and serving God?

As God continues to prepare Israel for entry into the Promised Land, He lays out for them a series of blessing and curses. Blessings if they obey, and curses if they chose not to obey. Look at verses 16 and 17. In these verses God warns His people not to turn to the idolatry of the nations around them. He further warns them that if they do become idolatrous there will be consequences—literally God will shut up the heavens so there is no rain, and their crops will fail.

On the other hand, in verses 22 – 25, God tells His people what will happen if they are faithful to Him, seeking to carefully observe His laws, loving God with all of their heart, and holding fast to Him. God will defeat their enemies and enlarge their territory.

As you read this it all sounds very works oriented. Do what is right, and God will bless you; do what is wrong, and God will curse you. It sounds that way because in one sense it is. But let's not lose sight of the foundation upon which God calls His people to love and faithfulness. It is because of all that God has already done, and all that God has promised to do for them. God's grace came first, their obedience and love flow out of God's love and mercy.

1 John 4: 19 We love because He first loved us.

God does not love us because of the works we do for Him. He loves us simply for reasons all His own—because He chooses to.

Ephesians 1: 3 – 6 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

We are what we are and we do what we do because God chose to love us when we didn't deserve to be loved. That is the foundation for why we are to live as God has called us to live.

Now if you think about what God is saying here, it makes complete sense. Why did God choose Israel and bring them into the Promised Land? In the book of Isaiah, God says that Israel was to be a light to the nations around them. Jesus echoed that theme in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5: 14 – 16 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

We take those words and apply them to ourselves and our church, and rightly so, but remember when Jesus spoke those words he was speaking to a Jewish audience, and in doing that he was reminding them of what God had called them to be. So, what does all of this have to do with the blessings and curses here in Deuteronomy 11? The reason why God would bless Israel for their obedience and worship was so that their light would shine brightly to the world around them. If Israel was to turn from God and worship idols like the nations around them, they would no longer be a light to the nations. If God blessed them in their idolatry, the other nations would begin thinking that Israel's idolatry was the way to go.

So here is the application for our lives. We are saved by grace, but we are called to be salt and light to the world around us, so the way we live our lives matters. God blesses us so that we can bless others with His blessings. If we look like the world around us, we should expect for God to remove His blessing from our lives, so that the world won't be deluded into thinking that their lives can be blessed if they continue to live in sin and rebellion against God.

The Book of Revelations actually gives us a very clear picture of this. Listen to what Jesus said, in speaking to the church of Ephesus:

Revelation 2: 4 – 5 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

If a church or a believer abandons their first love, Christ, then they begin to look like the world around them. Why should Christ bless them if that is the case? The phrase “remove your lampstand” literally means that the presence of Christ will leave. A Christian cannot lose their salvation, but a Christian and the church can lose the blessing of the daily presence and power of Christ in their lives because they turn away from Christ and their love for him.

<u>First Catechism</u>	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 4. How can you glorify God? By loving him and doing what he commands.	Q. 2. What rule has God given to direct us how to glorify and enjoy him? The Word of God, which consists of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments,[a] is the only rule to direct us how to glorify and enjoy him.[b] [a]. Mat 19:4-5 with Gen 2:24; Luk 24:27, 44; 1 Cor 2:13; 1 Cor 14:37; 2 Pet 1:20-21; 2 Pet 3:2, 15-16 [b]. Deu 4:2; Psa 19:7-11; Isa 8:20; John 15:11; John 20:30-31; Acts 17:11; 2 Tim 3:15-17; 1 John 1:4

Question 1. How can you “lay up” God’s word in your heart? How would memorizing Scripture help you do this? What verse can you memorize today?

Question 2. What blessings has God given you that you can share with those around you?

What was God telling Israel about how to worship Him in these verses? Look again at verse 8.

Deuteronomy 12: 8 “You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes.

As Israel wandered in the Wilderness, people offered sacrifices to God wherever they saw fit, and in the land they were about to inherit, there were places of worship everywhere—on high hills, under trees. But God was telling Israel that once they came to the Promised Land, it would no longer be that way. There would be a place established by God – a place where God would put His name for His dwelling.

Because God is God and we are His creatures, God has the right to decide where and how we are to worship Him.

In John 4, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman by a well. A conversation ensues about worship and the proper place of worship.

John 4: 19 – 24 The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

The Samaritans were a mixed race of people that partially descended from the Ten Northern Tribes of Israel. The Ten Northern Tribes of Israel became their own kingdom after Solomon died. Jeroboam became their king, and he did not want his people going to Jerusalem, the place God had designated to put His name to be worshipped. So, Jeroboam set up two places of worship with golden calves in Dan and Bethel. After the Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC, many from that kingdom were taken into captivity. The Samaritans were the ones who were not taken. They intermarried with other nations, but they continued to offer worship at a place known as Mt. Gerizim, which is the mountain the woman is referring to in this conversation.

Jesus’ response to this woman is very interesting in view of what God has said here in Deuteronomy 12. A change was about to come in the way people worship. Worship would no longer center around a specific place where God had put His name. But God would still be dictating the terms of how He would be worshipped. It would be in spirit and in truth.

What does that mean for us?

We cannot come to Him however we see fit; we must come to Him on His terms. Jesus made it clear what those terms are:

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Think about what Jesus is saying in that verse. We cannot come to God as we see fit. We have to come to God through Jesus. What does that mean? Think of the words to the hymn Rock of Ages. “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling.” The only way to come to God and worship in a way that is pleasing and acceptable to Him is through Jesus. The only way to come to Jesus is with a broken and contrite heart.

Psalm 51: 16 – 17 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

But now think what the Bible tells us happens to us when we come to God through Jesus with a broken and contrite heart.

Revelation 22: 3 – 5 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

<u>New City Catechism</u>

Question 9. What Does God Require in the First, Second, and Third Commandments?

First, that we know and trust God as the only true and living God. Second, that we avoid all idolatry and do not worship God improperly. Third, that we treat God's name with fear and reverence, honoring also his Word and works.

Question 1. Think about Revelation 22:3-5 in light of what God says in Deuteronomy 12 about worship. Where did God say worship could only take place? If you are a Christian, where has God put his name? How can you worship God in your life, with all your being in spirit and truth?

As Israel settled in the Promised Land, God instituted two different, but related, mechanisms to eliminate poverty while at the same time keeping others from becoming too wealthy. One of those ways is found here in Deuteronomy 15. Every seven years all debts between fellow Israelites were to be canceled and forgiven. This was a way to keep people from becoming chronic debtors with no hope of ever being able to be out of debt. But there is another interesting provision that God made to help ensure economic parity in Israel. This provision is found in Leviticus 25 and is known as the Year of Jubilee. As the Israelites took possession of the Promised Land, God gave each the twelve tribes of Israel their own territory within the Promised Land, and then each of the tribal territories were divided among the clans and families of that tribe. Each family's land was to be a lasting inheritance, in other words, it was always to belong to the family it had been given to. In the Year of Jubilee, all land was returned to the original family that owned the land.

These provisions gave every family in Israel hope for the future no matter what they might have experienced in their past or what their present circumstances were. Even if a debt could not be repaid, even if the family land was sold, there was always a way for a family to get out of debt, get their land back and get back on their feet again. Over the years, as the Israelites moved away from God and God's rule over them, these two practices were abandoned. There was no hope for the poor; there was no way out of debt.

But Jesus began his earthly ministry with these words:

Luke 4:16-21 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus came to restore hope to those who were poor and without hope. He came to give us back what we have lost. The Year of Jubilee and the year for cancelling debts were more than just ways of ensuring economic stability and giving economic hope to the Israelites, they also serve as a picture of the debt we could never repay being cancelled forever.

Colossians 2:13-14 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

And the hope of an eternal inheritance that can never be taken away from us and we can never lose.

1 Peter 1:3-4 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,

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
Question 56. How does God justify you? God forgives all my sins and accepts me as righteous through Christ.	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. What debt did you owe God before your salvation? How should you respond since he paid this debt for you?

In Old Testament Israel, an Israelite could become a slave by selling themselves into slavery to settle a debt. In a sense, this was a forced kind of slavery that was brought about by an inability to pay a debt that had been incurred. But even in this we can see God’s mercy. The first thing we need to understand is that this form of slavery was very different from the Civil War era slavery in America. First, an Israelite could only enter into this arrangement voluntarily, so it was more like indentured servitude than it was slavery. Secondly, God placed limits on the term that this form of servitude could last. In the seventh year, the slave was to be made free again, and notice what verse 13 says. The slave owner was not to send the slave away empty handed after their term of service. Just as God provided for the Israelites to leave Egypt with plunder from the Egyptians, a slave owner was to see to it that the newly freed slave had material goods to start life over again economically.

But there is one other provision that God made for a slave who had served his master for six years and it is found in verses 16-17. If a slave wanted to, they could stay on as a slave to their master. Making this choice would mark them forever by having their ear lobe pierced. Why would a slave do this? The answer is found in verse 16—because they deeply love their master.

Understanding this Old Testament practice helps us to understand what Paul writes in:

Romans 6:14-18 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey-- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

At one time we were slaves to sin and had no choice but to serve our master Satan. But because of Jesus’ death on the cross we have been set free from our slavery to sin. But how do we respond to one who gave so much to set us free? We willingly allow ourselves to once again become slaves—not to sin, but to righteousness—willing servants of Jesus Christ, the master we love.

New City Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>Question 1. What Is Our Only Hope in Life and Death? That we are not our own but belong, body and soul, both in life and death, to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ.</p>	<p>Q. 34. Why do you call him “our Lord”? A. Because— not with gold or silver, but with his precious blood—¹he 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</p>

Question 1. Are you a willing servant for Jesus? How can you improve on serving Him with your time, talents, and treasures?

Question 2. What comfort do you have that you can willingly serve Jesus? What hope do you have for the future because of His love for you?

God always intended for Israel to have a king. We can see that clearly as we read these verses. But Israel’s king wasn’t to be chosen as other countries chose their king, and Israel’s king was not to behave like the kings of other lands. Israel’s king was always to be humble and dedicated to following the laws of God. In spite of his sinfulness, David, Israel’s second king, was a picture of this ideal king that God describes in Deuteronomy 17. Ultimately these verses point us forward to Jesus, our eternal king. He is a picture of humility. Speaking about Jesus, the prophet Isaiah said these words, which Matthew’s gospel quotes as it describes Jesus’ servant-like kingship:

Matthew 12:17-21 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope." (Isaiah 42:1-4).

Paul also describes Jesus’ humble kingship.

Philippians 2:5-8 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

Servant-like humility isn’t a characteristic we would expect to find in a king. But Jesus isn’t your ordinary king. Israel’s king was also supposed to be dedicated to fully obeying God’s law. Jesus did exactly that.

Matthew 5:17-18 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

These words in Deuteronomy told the Israelites what kind of king they should seek to rule over them, but more importantly these words point us ahead to Jesus the true king.

Revelation 17:14 the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings-- and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

Jesus, our king, is humble and gentle like a lamb, but he is also the Lion of Judah, our warrior king who rules us, defends us, and defeats our enemies—sin, death, and Satan.

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 75. Why do you need Christ as your king? Because I am weak and helpless.	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. How can we participate in Jesus’ kingdom? Read Matthew 28: 18-20.

Question 2. How can you submit to Jesus’ lordship over your life?

Question 3. Where can you learn how to serve Jesus as King?

In the Old Testament there were three offices: the office of king, priest, and prophet. These offices were separate and distinct, and each was to be held by different men. The priests were responsible to be the mediators between God and man, offering sacrifices to God on behalf of the people of God. The office of king was instituted by God to provide leadership and to rule over the people of God. The office of prophet was instituted by God to speak for God and communicate the will of God to the people of God. Each of these offices points us to Jesus. Jesus is our prophet, priest, and king. It is easy to understand how the office of priest points us to Jesus as our priest making the sacrifice for our sin, and yesterday we saw that the words written in the Book of Deuteronomy pointed the Israelites and ourselves to our true king, Jesus. Today in our reading, Moses describes the office of a true prophet, and once again this office points us to Jesus. Moses tells the Israelites that a true prophet will speak for God. Peter, speaking in the Book of Acts, quotes from this passage in Deuteronomy and tells his listeners that Jesus is the one whom Moses was speaking about.

Acts 3:18-26 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you-- even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.' "Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

A true prophet didn't just predict the future; a true prophet spoke for God. He called people to repent and turn to God, and revealed the will of God to those who would listen. That is exactly what Jesus did as he ministered here on earth. He called people to repent.

Matthew 4:17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

He tells people what God's will for them is:

John 6:37-40 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. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Jesus is the true prophet that Moses was speaking about in Deuteronomy 18, not because he foretold the future (although he did do that in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21), but because He spoke for God calling us to repent and to know God's will. As the true prophet, Jesus reveals God to us.

<u>First Catechism</u>	<u>Westminster Shorter Catechism</u>
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. Read John 14:7-9. What does it mean that Jesus reveals God to us?

Question 2. What does true repentance look like? What does it look like to live a life of repentance?

In verse 10, right after Moses tells the Israelites to obey the Lord and keep His commands and turn to the Lord with all their heart and soul, Moses makes this stunning statement in verse 11. He says doing this “is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach.” If you have ever tried to obey God and turn to Him with all of your heart and soul, you may not agree with what Moses says. If we are honest, we would have to admit that it seems awfully hard for us to do this, and we often don’t do it very well. So why would Moses say such a thing? Because what Moses was talking about is faith, not works. The key to what Moses is talking about is found in verse 14. The righteousness that the Israelites needed to please God was found in God’s word and the covenant that God had made with them. The law didn’t just call the Israelites to obedience but it also provided a system of sacrifices to atone for their disobedience. What Moses was calling the Israelites to do was to embrace the law and the covenant promises—to commit to them with their mouth and believe them in their hearts. If they would live in faith, they would find the righteousness that Moses is exhorting them to have.

It is interesting that Paul quotes these very words in Romans 10: 6-11:

Romans 10:6-11 But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

So, what is Paul saying? First, that righteousness comes by faith, and our faith is born out in our lives as we believe in our hearts that Jesus is our Lord and Savior to the point that we are so convinced this is true that we are willing to confess it with our mouths.

The requirement of the old covenant under Moses was to confess and believe, and the requirement of the new covenant in Jesus Christ is exactly the same—confess and believe. That is the essence of true faith, and it is the essence of righteousness. As we have stressed over and over again, everything in the Old Testament points us to Jesus. All of the covenants are about finding our righteousness in faith, not in our works.

New City Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>Question 30. What is Faith in Jesus Christ? Faith in Jesus Christ is acknowledging the truth of everything that God has revealed in his Word, trusting in him, and also receiving and resting on him alone for salvation as he is offered to us in the gospel.</p>	<p>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</p>

Question 1. What are some examples of how faith manifests itself in a Christian’s life? What are some examples of what it looks like when a person is trusting in their own righteousness?

Joshua has just taken over as the commander and leader of Israel, and as the Book of Joshua opens, Israel is poised to enter the Promised Land. Can you imagine the things that Joshua must have been feeling as he took the reins of leadership from Moses? Clearly, Joshua has some doubts about what God has called him to do and some doubts about his ability to pull it off, because three times God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous (verses 6, 7, 9). What was Joshua’s courage to be based in? Look at verse 3: God promises to give the Israelites every place where they set foot. Look at verse 5: no one will be able to stand against them. Look again at verse 5: God will be with Joshua and will never leave him or forsake him. Look at verse 9: the Lord will be with Joshua wherever he goes. Those are very powerful promises that God makes to Joshua as Joshua is about to lead the Israelites in holy war to drive the wickedness from the Promised Land and take possession of it. As Paul writes in Romans 8: 31, “If God is with us, who can be against us?” All Joshua has to do is be faithful and obey the law of the Lord (verses 7-8) and God will do everything else. His success is guaranteed.

Do you ever wish God would make a promise like that to you? He has. Think about what Jesus said in Matthew 28.

Matthew 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Doesn’t this almost mirror exactly what God said to Joshua? But how much do we really take these words to heart? Are we strong and courageous for Jesus? We too are involved in holy war to overthrow Satan and the kingdom of this earth and bring the kingdom of Jesus Christ. But who is really doing the fighting? It is Jesus. The battle belongs to him.

Psalm 44:4-7 You are my King and my God,... Through you we push back our enemies; through your name we trample our foes. I do not trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory; but you give us victory over our enemies, you put our adversaries to shame.

Just as God called Joshua to be strong and courageous to take possession of what had been promised to Israel, we too are called to be strong and courageous in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to take possession of what has been promised to us.

1 John 5:4-5 everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>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.</p>	<p>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</p>

Question 1. Knowing that God is with us, how should we approach the mission that he has called us to? How are you intentionally acting on this mission he has set before us?

In a very real sense today's reading captures the story of what the Bible is all about, and what Jesus is all about, because today's reading is about finding the broken and the lost and restoring them to what they were created to be. It is a story of redemption. Why did Jesus come to earth?

Luke 19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

Rahab is about as lost as you can be. She is a resident of the city of Jericho and a Canaanite. The Canaanites were a people who were doomed by God to destruction because of their wickedness.

Deuteronomy 9:4 No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you.

Rahab was very much a part of this wickedness, because as verse 1 tells us she was a prostitute (some people try to clean this up and say these words meant that she was an innkeeper, but the more likely translation is that Rahab was part of the wicked life of Jericho, engaged in prostitution). This was a sinful woman, living among a sinful people in a sinful land. Yet, God chooses to work through her to save the lives of the spies, and her own life as well. She was marked for destruction but found salvation. Isn't that each of our stories as well? Because of our own sin, we were doomed to destruction, but because of God's grace, we are saved.

As you read this passage it becomes clear that the more Rahab heard about Israel's God, the more she wanted that God to be her God. Ultimately, it was her faith in that God that saved her. She believed in the God of Israel enough to risk her own life to save the lives of the spies. She believed in the God of Israel enough to hang the red cord from her window as Israel surrounded the city of Jericho. She believed in the God of Israel enough to desire to come out of her sin and out of her city to become part of the people of God.

Joshua 6:25 But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho-- and she lives among the Israelites to this day.

That by itself is a wonderful story of God working through faith to bring salvation to the lost; but that is not the end of the story. Rahab was not just saved because she had saved the lives of the spies, she was saved because God had plans for her life. In spite of the fact that Rahab was a Canaanite and not a Jew, in spite of the fact that she was once a prostitute, she was chosen by God to be part of the lineage of Jesus.

Matthew 1:1-16 A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.... Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife...and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

Pretty amazing stuff for a sinful, broken woman like Rahab to part of the family line of Jesus. But that is the great story line of the Bible. There is no one who is so broken that they are beyond God's reach or God's power to be made whole again. God redeems the vilest of sinners and turns them into models of faith.

James 2:25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead

Isn't this exactly what Paul is talking about in:

2 Corinthians 5: 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

<u>New City Catechism</u>	Westminster Shorter Catechism
<p>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.</p>	<p>Q. 20. Did God leave all mankind to perish in the state of sin and misery? God, solely out of his love and mercy, from all eternity elected some to everlasting life,[a] and entered into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of the state of sin and misery, and to bring them into a state of salvation by a Redeemer.[b] [a]. Acts 13:48; Eph 1:4-5; 2 Thes 2:13-14 [b]. Gen 3:15; Gen 17:7; Exo 19:5-6; Jer 31:31-34; Mat 20:28; 1 Cor 11:25; Heb 9:15</p>

Question 1. Is there anyone you know whom you think is beyond the saving grace of God? Why is it wrong to think that? How might God use you as a vessel to bring them unto Himself? How can you actively disciple them?

Before Israel could take possession of the land God had promised to them, they had to cross the Jordan River. In most times of the year this was not a great obstacle, because at the point where Israel was going to cross the river it was not normally very deep, only about three to six feet and there were plenty of places where the river was safe to ford. But verse 15 tells us that this was not a normal time. This was the time of the year when the Jordan was flowing at flood stage, which meant that the river now was over 150 feet wide and 10 – 20 feet deep, meaning that it was impassable. To compound the problem there were over 2 million Israelites that needed to get across the river along with all of their livestock and possessions. You would think God would have them wait until the dry season when the crossing would be more manageable, but that is not how God works. God told Joshua and the Israelites that now, during flood stage, was the time for them to cross over. God told Joshua and the Israelites not to worry about the river, because He would take care of it for them. All God told them to do was to have faith and they would see God work miracles.

God could have stopped the river first, and then told the Israelites to get up and cross over, but instead look what God commanded the Israelites to do in verse 8. The priests were to take the ark of the covenant and carry it into the flood waters. The water would not stop flowing until they set their feet in the river.

This account of the river crossing raises two big questions. First, why did God make them cross over during flood stage, and second, why did God not make the river stop flowing until they set their feet in it? Think of the faith that was required for Joshua and the priests to do what God commanded. If God didn't do what He said he was going to do, at the very least they would have looked like fools and the very worst they very well may have drowned. This was a test that God was giving to the Israelites to test the sincerity of their faith, much like the test God gave Abraham when He told Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. It was one thing for the Israelites to say they trusted God. It was another thing for them to act on their faith.

James 2:17 faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

In order to claim what God had promised to them, Israel had to trust God and then act on that trust. Isn't the same true for us? It is one thing to say we believe in God, and we believe His promises; it is another thing for us to act on that belief. Real faith is proven through action. For Joshua and the Israelites to prove their faith was real and claim what God had promised to them, they had to trust God at His word and step into the floodwaters. Jesus told us that, as his followers, the way we prove our faith is real is by trusting him and willingly dropping everything else to follow him.

Luke 9:23-26 Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

If we take Jesus' words seriously, and we should, this is a scary proposition—to give up everything for him. The only way that Israel could get the rest that God had promised would be theirs in the Promised Land was by faith. The only way that we can get to the rest that Jesus promises to us is by faith—denying ourselves and taking up our cross and following him.

As to the reason why God told the Israelites to cross the river at flood stage, the answer to that is found in tomorrow's reading.

New City Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>Question 30. What is Faith in Jesus Christ? Faith in Jesus Christ is acknowledging the truth of everything that God has revealed in his Word, trusting in him, and also receiving and resting on him alone for salvation as he is offered to us in the gospel.</p>	<p>Q. 21. What is true faith? A. True faith is not only a sure knowledge by which I hold as true all that God has revealed to us in Scripture;¹ it is also a wholehearted trust,² which the Holy Spirit creates in me³ by the gospel,⁴ that God has freely granted, not only to others but to me also,⁵ forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness, and salvation.⁶ These are gifts of sheer grace, granted solely by Christ's merit.⁷</p> <p>1 John 17:3, 17; Heb. 11:1-3; James 2:19 2 Rom. 4:18-21; 5:1; 10:10; Heb. 4:14-16 3 Matt. 16:15-17; John 3:5; Acts 16:14 4 Rom. 1:16; 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:21 5 Gal. 2:20 6 Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:10 7 Rom. 3:21-26; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-10</p>

Question 1. When is a recent time when you didn't act in faith? How did your actions manifest this? What was the root cause of the reason why you didn't act in faith?

Question 2. When is a recent time you did act in faith?

Today's reading is a continuation of the account of Israel crossing the Jordan River to enter the Promised Land. We left off yesterday without answering the question of why God had the Israelites cross the Jordan at flood stage. The answer to that question is found in verse 24 of today's reading.

Joshua 4:24 He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God."

God worked intentionally to stretch the faith of the Israelites so that He could show both the Israelites and the all the other nations of the world his power. By once again showing the Israelites His amazing power, God proved that he alone was the great God they should put their full faith and trust in.

The moment we take our eyes off God is the moment we begin to rely upon ourselves. Think what happened to Peter when he tried to join Jesus walking on the water.

Matthew 14:25-31 During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

The moment Peter took his eyes off Jesus and began to look at the forces of nature swirling about him, he began to sink. The same is true for us. The moment we take our eyes off God is the moment our doubts and fears will begin to swallow us up. Joshua and the Israelites faced a daunting task as they entered the Promised Land. In order to take the land, they would have to drive out the inhabitants of the land. These inhabitants, the Canaanites, were strong powerful people who lived in cities with great walls around them. Remember it was just forty years earlier that their forefathers had chickened out and refused to enter the Promised Land, because the people who lived there seemed like giants to them. By making the Israelites do the seemingly impossible – crossing the Jordan River at full flood stage – God proved that He could do anything if they would just keep their eyes fixed on him.

As you read today's reading, notice how God commanded the Israelites to build an altar to remind them and their children to come in later generations of God's awesome power. By looking at this altar, the Israelites would always be reminded of what God did for them on that historic day. As Christians, we have our own monument to remind us of the awesome power of the God we serve. It is the empty cross. As we gaze on the cross, we are reminded of God's great love for us that He sent His Son to die for our sin, but we are also reminded of God's awesome power as that Son who was slain for our sins was raised to new life three days later.

As the Israelites looked at the altar made from the twelve stones taken from the Jordan's riverbed, they would be reminded that if God could make the Jordan dry at flood stage so they could walk across it, there would be no person or any city who would be able to stand against them as they took possession of the Promised Land.

<u>First Catechism</u>
Question 141. Did Christ remain in the grave after his crucifixion? No. He rose bodily from the grave on the third day after his death.

Question 1. What powers do you fear? As we look at the cross, how are we too reminded of the awesome power of God? What does He have the power to conquer? Then should there be any other power that we need to fear?

As Joshua and the Israelites get ready to conquer Jericho you can imagine Joshua standing out in the fields surrounding the city and trying to figure out how he can lead Israel in conquest of this city. Suddenly, there in front of him is a man with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua’s first thought concerning this man is whether he is a friend or a foe. Is this man with Israel or against Israel? The man’s answer is very interesting. This man is the commander of the armies of the Lord, so the question isn’t whose side is this man on, but rather who will be on his side? Will Joshua and the Israelites go their own way, or will they fight with the army of the Lord? As soon as Joshua realizes who this man is, he falls to the ground in worship and asks, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?” The message is very interesting. At this point it is not a battle plan, although that will come in just a few verses, but rather the message is that the ground that Joshua is standing on is holy ground. Joshua is in the presence of God. Many commentators believe that this commander of the armies of the Lord is none other than a pre-incarnate visitation of Jesus Christ. (The Bible teaches us that Jesus has always existed; he is God. He existed before he was born in a manger in Bethlehem. So, when the term pre-incarnate visitation is used by commentators, they are saying that Jesus appeared in human form at times in the Old Testament before he was born. The theological term for these pre-incarnation appearances is theophany.) Whether you believe that or whether you believe that this was an angel who appeared to Joshua on the plains of Jericho, you would have to agree that this Commander of the armies of the Lord, who is about to lead the Israelites in conquest of the Promised Land, is a picture of Jesus.

Revelation 19:11-16 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

It is Jesus who leads the armies of heaven in the great final battle against Satan and the kings of this earth. Jesus is our great warrior king, and he is the commander of the armies of the Lord. Just like Joshua and the Israelites, we do not fight in our own strength. We fight in the power of the Lord.

*Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing,
Were not the right man on our side, The man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He. Lord Sabbath, his name, From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle. – ‘A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,’ Martin Luther*

New City Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
<p>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.</p>	<p>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</p>

Question 1. How has God humbled and taught you that the victory is only found in One place? Where is it?
Question 2. Even though our lives are In Christ now, what are we still fighting against? When will we see complete victory?

After the amazing victory at Jericho, Israel suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the city of Ai. Joshua 7 gives us the reason for this defeat. It was because of Achan’s sin. God had told the Israelites that the plunder and riches from the conquest of Jericho belonged to God. If you stop and think about this, it was only fair because God had done all of the work in the conquest. What God was saying to Israel was, “honor me first, and I will take care of you.” But Achan acted unfaithfully. He took some of the plunder for himself and hid it in his tent. Because of his sin, Israel was defeated at Ai. As you read this story and you see Achan’s sin uncovered, it breaks your heart. How could a man trade his life and his children’s lives for a robe, some silver, and some gold? We wonder why God acted so harshly toward Achan. Well, partly it was because Achan had stolen what belonged to God, but even more importantly it was because Achan valued these paltry possessions more than he valued his inheritance in the Promised Land and more than he valued his relationship with God. Stop and think about what he did. Achan traded a lasting inheritance in the Promised Land for himself and generations of his family for a little bit of wealth in the present. He couldn’t wait for his inheritance, so he took it right away.

It is easy for us to be critical of Achan, but how often do we do the same? How often do we value the stuff we have right now more than we value our eternal inheritance? How often do we trade eternal pleasures for our present immediate self-gratification? The Puritans had an expression for this, they called it ‘buying the pearl.’ The expression was based on this parable that Jesus told:

Matthew 13:45-46 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

Are we willing to trade everything to have Jesus and eternal life, or are we like Achan trying to hold onto our little insignificant treasures? On numerous occasions, Jesus made it abundantly clear that we cannot have him and the world too. John, Jesus’ beloved disciple, writes this:

1 John 2: 15 – 17 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

The world demands that we give up our lives to have what it offers, but what the world offers us dies when we die. Jesus, too, demands that we give up our lives and everything in it to have him, he is the pearl of greatest price, but remember this: Jesus gave up his life for us, and in Jesus we get an inheritance:

1 Peter 1: 4 an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.

New City Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
<p>Question 52. What Hope Does Everlasting Life Hold for Us? 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. 84. What does every sin deserve? Although some sins will be more severely punished than others,[a] yet every sin deserves God’s wrath and curse, both in this life and the life that is to come.[b] [a]. Mat 11:21-24; Luk 12:47-48 [b]. Mat 25:41; Gal 3:10; Eph 5:6; Jas 2:10</p>

Question 1. What little treasures are you still trying to hold onto? How can you refocus your heart so that you desire Jesus more than those treasures?

After the Israelites gain a strong footing in the Promised Land, they renew the covenant just as Moses had instructed them to do in Deuteronomy 27.

Deuteronomy 27:9-13 Then Moses and the priests, who are Levites, said to all Israel, "Be silent, O Israel, and listen! You have now become the people of the LORD your God. Obey the LORD your God and follow his commands and decrees that I give you today." On the same day Moses commanded the people: When you have crossed the Jordan, these tribes shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin. And these tribes shall stand on Mount Ebal to pronounce curses: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali.

As you read this passage try to mentally picture the layout and what is going on. As the Israelites stand before the Lord to renew their covenant vows, half of the tribes stand at the foot of Mount Ebal and pronounce curses on those who would break the law. The other half of the tribes stand at the foot of Mount Gerizim and pronounce blessings on those who would keep the law. According to God's instructions in Deuteronomy 27, on Mount Ebal a monument is built that is made of stones which are covered in plaster and the Ten Commandments are inscribed in the plaster. It is significant that this monument to the law was placed on Mount Ebal, the same mount that had the curses, because as Paul tells us if we rely on the law for our righteousness, it can only bring a curse.

Galatians 3:10 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."

So how do we get to the blessings? Stop and think about what this passage tells us is in the valley between the mount of curses and mount of blessings—it is an altar where sacrifice can be made. It is only through a sacrifice that we can come to the blessings. Christ's sacrifice on the cross removed the curse of the law.

Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree."

That is how the curse of sin is removed from our lives, but that still doesn't get us to the blessing. It is the sacrifice of Christ that does that as well because the sacrifice of Christ doesn't just remove the curse of sin, it also brings the blessing of righteousness.

Romans 3:21-22 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.

New City Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
<p>Question 19. Is There Any Way to Escape Punishment and Be Brought Back into God's Favor? Yes, to satisfy his justice, God himself, out of mere mercy, reconciles us to himself and delivers us from sin and from the punishment for sin, by a Redeemer.</p>	<p>Q. 85. What does God require of us, that we may escape his wrath and curse, due to us for sin? To escape the wrath and curse due to us for sin, God requires of us faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and repentance leading to life[a] together with the diligent use of all the outward means by which Christ gives to us the benefits of redemption.[b] [a]. Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21 [b]. Acts 2:38; 1 Cor 11:24-25; Col 3:16</p>

Question 1. Consider the words of Psalm 32 verses 1-2. What can you give thanks for? Where are the blessings of forgiveness and righteousness found?

Today’s reading contains the amazing story of Caleb. As you may recall, Caleb was one of the twelve spies sent out by Moses to explore the Promised Land. Only Caleb and Joshua came back with a good report about the land. Only Caleb and Joshua believed that God would give them this land just as He had promised. Because of their faith, Caleb and Joshua were the only two people from their generation who were allowed by God to enter the Promised Land. Now that the Israelites have established themselves in the land, it is time for the land to be divided among the tribes and the families. Caleb is eighty-five years old. What kind of land do you think he would ask for? Wouldn’t you expect him to ask for a prime piece of land that would be easy to settle into? You might expect that, but that is not what Caleb asks for. He asks for the high country, the unsettled country. The part of the country that still has people who seem like giants living in it. Caleb is just as confident today as he was forty years earlier that God would grant him success and victory over all who would stand opposed to him.

We have those same precious promises in Christ.

1 John 5:4-5 everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

We too can be assured of victory, assured of overcoming the world, if we will just stand firm in our faith.

*No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me;
 from life’s first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny.
 No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from his hand;
 till he returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I’ll stand.*

-Keith Getty, Stuart Townsend “In Christ Alone”

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 149. What will God do for believers at the last day? He will give them a home with him in the new heaven and the new earth.	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. Even though it may at times seem like we don’t have the victory, why shouldn’t we despair? How do we know with certainty that Jesus will overcome?

As Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land, his first task was to conquer the land, second to settle the land, and third to teach the Israelites how to worship in the land. The first 22 chapters of the book of Joshua deal with the conquest of the land and the division of the land among the twelve tribes. Now in chapters 23 and 24, Joshua reminds the Israelites that this land they have been given is a gift of God’s grace, and if the Israelites want to continue to live in that grace and in God’s blessing, they must be faithful and uphold their part of the covenant. That is the pattern of all of the covenants that God makes with his people. God freely gives us His grace with no strings or conditions attached to it, but then He call us to respond to the grace that He has shown to us by worshipping Him alone and living in obedience to His rule in our lives.

That is why in chapter 24 Joshua starts by reminding the Israelites of all that God has done for them. To do this, Joshua starts by pointing out that Abraham, the father of Israel, wasn’t even a worshipper of God when he was first called by God. The same is true for us.

Ephesians 2:1-7 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.

We were nothing before God called us and showed his mercy in our lives. We were dead in our sins, following our own sinful natures, but then God intervened in our lives and changed everything by showing us His grace. But God doesn’t stop with just showing us grace. In verses 3 to 13 of Joshua 24, Joshua reminds the Israelites of God’s covenant faithfulness as He worked to make Israel into a great nation and brought them into their inheritance in the Promised Land. Notice in verses 12 to 13 that Joshua reminds the Israelites that it was God who did everything for them. The same is true for us. God is the one who works in us to make us what He wants us to be. We can cooperate in the process, but we are a work of God from start to finish, and God is the one who is doing it all.

Ephesians 2:6-10 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Based on all that God had done for Israel, Joshua calls the Israelites to make a decision about who they will worship and serve as they live in the Promised Land. “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve....but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” The choice we have in this process is how we will respond to God’s grace in our lives.

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 42. Who can change a sinner's heart? The Holy Spirit alone.	Q. 46. What is required in the first commandment? The first commandment requires us to know and acknowledge God to be the only true God and our God; and to worship and glorify him accordingly.[a] [a]. 1 Chr 28:9; Isa 45:20-25; Mat 4:10

Question 1. How have you been responding to God’s grace lately? How have you been worshipping and serving Him? How haven’t you been worshipping and serving Him (i.e. worshipping other things and serving yourself)?
Question 2. What is the only logical choice on how to respond to God’s grace according to Romans 12:1? What should be our only motive for serving Him?

After Joshua's death there is a vacuum of human leadership in Israel. The Book of Judges chronicles that vacuum. Joshua had led Israel well in conquering significant parts of the Promised Land and settling the Israelites there, but there was still much to be done. As the Book of Judges opens, we get an update on the progress the various tribes were making toward the complete conquest of the land. Some of the reports are quite encouraging, but overall, Judges 1 tells the story of a faltering and incomplete conquest. In fact, Judges 1 really tells the story of compromise. Pay close attention to verses 21 – 35.

In these verses there are three main themes that get repeated over and over again:

1. The tribes 'did not drive out' their enemies (21, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33)
2. Having not driven them out, they thought they might as well carry on and simply live alongside them (21, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33)
3. In fact, instead of driving them out, the Israelites decided they would keep them under their control and make these idolatrous and wicked Canaanite people slaves and forced laborers (28, 30, 33, 35)

From a human standpoint this may have seemed like a good plan, but it would lead to Israel's downfall. God had repeatedly warned Israel that this was not to happen and laid out clearly what would happen if they disobeyed His commands by allowing other nations to continue living in the land.

Exodus 34:11-16 Obey what I command you today. I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles. Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. "Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices. And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same."

God knew that these evil people and their evil ways would become a trap and lead Israel astray, which as you read the history of Israel, is exactly what happened. Why did the Israelites disobey God and compromise with these evil people? Because they thought they were strong enough spiritually to live alongside of the evil without being influenced by it.

1 Corinthians 10:11-12 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

This is where the book of Judges comes back and speaks directly to us as Christians. God has commanded His believers today not to compromise with the world.

1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world-- the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can goodness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? What harmony can there be between Christ and the Devil? How can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever? And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: "I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore, come out from them and separate yourselves from them, says the Lord. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you. And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty. "

God tells us this for the same reason that He commanded Israel not to make any agreements with the nations they had to drive out, because of how easy it is for us to be wrongly influenced and led away from the truth.

The truth is, if we, like the Israelites, are making compromises regarding our faith, we may be able to handle it for a while, but eventually we will give in. That is why the Bible tells us to flee from Satan and temptation.

James 4:7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

2 Timothy 2:22 Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

1 Timothy 6:10-11 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

1 Corinthians 10:13-14 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.

For Israel, the beginning of their downfall was a failure to fully obey God. They thought they could dabble around the edges of sin without succumbing to its power, but they were wrong and so are we when we think this way. Jesus, our savior, our example, lived a perfectly sinless life because he cared more about pleasing the Father and doing the Father's will than anything else. As we focus on Jesus and what he did for us at the cross, our love for him should increase, which in turn should increase our desire to serve him. So, as a result of that, our desire to dabble in temptation will diminish.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-- think about such things.

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>Question 34. Since We Are Redeemed by Grace Alone, Through Christ Alone, Must We Still Do Good Works and Obey God's Word? Yes, because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, also renews us by his Spirit; so that our lives may show love and gratitude to God; so that we may be assured of our faith by the fruits; and so that by our godly behavior others may be won to Christ.</p>	<p>Q. 16. Why must the mediator be a true and righteous human? A. God's justice demands that human nature, which has sinned, must pay for sin;¹ but a sinful human could never pay for others.² 1 Rom. 5:12, 15; 1 Cor. 15:21; Heb. 2:14-16 2 Heb. 7:26-27; 1 Pet. 3:18</p>

Question 1. What does it look like to live a life differently than the world does? Can you list some specific examples?

Question 2. When is a time you thought you could dabble and not be led astray? What happened when you thought that you could stand in your own power? What is the only true way we will be able to resist the temptation to dabble in sin?

There are several significant things in these verses that we should notice. First, we can see the whole pattern of the Book of Judges in these verses. Israel sins and forsakes God, God disciplines Israel by raising the countries around them to plunder and mistreat the Israelites, God then raises up a judge who calls the Israelites to repentance, and then God uses the judge to defeat the people who are oppressing the Israelites. Unfortunately, this pattern repeats itself over and over again during the 400 years that the Book of Judges covers.

The second thing we can see in this passage is the importance of remembering what God has done for us through Christ. What is the reason that the Israelites keep falling into sin? Look at verses 10, 11, and 12 of chapter 2. It is because they forgot what God had done. The basis for Israel’s obedience was always remembering what God had done for them leading them out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. The same is true for us. The basis for our obedience is the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

If we forget that sacrifice, it will directly impact our obedience. We must learn to love Christ more than we love our sin. Remembering is the first step in learning to love Christ more.

1 Corinthians 1:26 - 2:1 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

That is why observing the Lord’s Supper, and taking it seriously is so important for us.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The third thing we should take away from today’s reading is the reason why God allows these foreign nations to continue to exist and be a problem for the Israelites. It’s found beginning in chapter 2, verse 20, and continuing to chapter 3, verse 2. God allowed these nations to continue to exist to test the faith of the Israelites and train them.

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
Question 57. How does God sanctify you? God makes me more and more holy in heart and conduct.	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. According to James 1:2-4, what is the main reason God allows suffering to come into our lives? How has suffering trained you in the past? What did you learn?

In today's reading we see the first cycle of sin, discipline, repentance, and deliverance in the Book of Judges. The Israelites had sinned by falling into idol worship, and because of their sin, God gave them over to the King of Aram for eight years. After eight years of being subject to the King of Aram's oppression, they cried out to God for deliverance and God raised up a man named Othniel to be their judge and deliverer.

Othniel came from good stock—he was Caleb's nephew. The name Othniel means 'Lion of God' and in verse 10 we read that "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him." When Israel had forgotten God, the Lord does two things: first, He allows them to be defeated by that which their own hearts were being drawn to – prideful independence. Second, God raised up a deliverer who will remind them again of the power of God and their constant need to look and rely upon God for His power in their life. In the Old Testament it was an unusual phenomenon for the Spirit of the Lord to come upon a man, but because of Jesus it is the normal thing for those who belong to God.

On the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, Peter quotes this prophecy from the Book of Joel:

Acts 2:17-18 "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

Stop and think about this. All Christians, because of Jesus, have the Spirit and the power of the Lord upon them, just as Othniel did. Jesus, in fact, promised that this would be the case.

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."

The writers of the New Testament (especially Paul) were constantly trying to focus our attention on the fact that knowing God's life and power is critical if we are to be effective in our Christian life.

2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

Ephesians 3:16-21 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith... Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Notice how this story ends in Judges 3:11. Because of the power of the Lord that came upon Othniel the land had peace for forty years. Knowing the power of the Lord through the Spirit of the Lord brings peace to our lives. That's why Paul prayed this prayer for the believers in Ephesus.

Ephesians 1:18-23 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. 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.

Paul's prayer is just as true for us today! We too must see and know "the incomparably great power for us who believe."

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>Question 63. How can you get the help of the Holy Spirit? God has told us to pray for the Holy Spirit's help.</p>	<p>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</p>

Question 1. What are the implications in the Christian's life of the fact that the Holy Spirit is always with you?

This story is one of the more fascinating stories in all the Bible. Once again, Israel has fallen into idol worship. Once again, God has disciplined Israel this time by giving them over to the King of Moab. Once again, God raises up a deliverer, Ehud, the left-handed judge. Ehud made for himself a two-edged sword which he plunged into the belly of this overweight king, bringing his oppression of Israel to an end. A two-edged sword was how holy war was fought in the Old Testament. As Christians, we too are called to fight a holy war. We too are called to use the sword—not a sword made of steel, but the sword of God’s Word.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

The defeat of the enemy comes first through meditating on the word of God, then in allowing that meditation to overflow in praise and thankfulness. And finally, we see from this passage in Judges, that the enemy is defeated as the double-edged sword is thrust into the enemy’s side. For us, (and especially when trials arise) this means using the word of God as Jesus did to defeat the enemy in the wilderness. It means declaring the truth of the word, declaring the promises of God. It means using the truth of God’s word as your basis of praise and thankfulness to Him. It means renewing your mind with its truth when the arrows of doubt from the enemy flood in. Submit yourself to God, resist the enemy with the use of the sword of God’s Word and he will flee from you! This is how the cycle of sin and oppression is defeated in our lives as we engage in Holy War against Satan—the prince of this world.

Ephesians 6:17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

New City Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
<p>Question 42. How is the Word of God to be Read and Heard? 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? 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] [a]. Neh 8:8-9; Acts 20:32; Rom 10:14-17; 2 Tim 3:15-17</p>

Question 1. What is your attitude when you usually approach the Word of God? Why?

Question 2. How does the Word of God transform our thinking? How will our transformed thinking lead to transformed living? What are some practical examples of this?

Question 3. Pray that the Word of God may be your greatest treasure, that you meditate and live by it.

The story of Deborah is an interesting story because it shows what happens when people choose to not trust God and fully cooperate with God’s plan. Israel has once again fallen into judgment because of their idol worship, and God speaks to Deborah because there seems to be no men who are willing to be Godly leaders of Israel. In that culture and in that day, for a woman to be leading Israel and acting as its judge was very unusual and it said a lot about the state of affairs in Israel. You can see the lack of willing leadership on the part of men in the man who was called by God to lead but refused to. His name is Barak and through Deborah, the prophetess, God promises to deliver Sisera, Israel’s oppressor into Barak’s hands. All Barak has to do is act—obey God. But Barak refuses to cooperate with God’s plan unless Deborah goes with him. As Deborah agrees to go with Barak, she tells Barak, in verse 9, that the normal honor due to a victorious commander will not go to Barak but will go to a woman instead. As you read the story it becomes clear who the gets the honor. It is indeed a woman, and her name is Jael. She is the one who puts Sisera to death.

Each of us is called by God to do certain things in the world we live in. We are saved to serve. We are given opportunities to glorify Christ and share in that glory. If we refuse to do what God has called us to do, it doesn’t mean that God’s plan will not be carried out, but it does mean that we will miss out on the blessing of being part of that plan.

Isaiah 55:10-11 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Through Christ we are invited to be part of God’s plan to take the good news of the Gospel to the world around us. If we sit back and do not do our part, God will raise up someone else to do it.

New City Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>Question 34. Since We Are Redeemed by Grace Alone, Through Christ Alone, Must We Still Do Good Works and Obey God’s Word? Yes, because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, also renews us by his Spirit; so that our lives may show love and gratitude to God; so that we may be assured of our faith by the fruits; and so that by our godly behavior others may be won to Christ.</p>	<p>Q. 86. Since we have been delivered from our misery by grace through Christ without any merit of our own, why then should we do good works? A. Because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, is also restoring us by his Spirit into his image, so that with our whole lives we may show that we are thankful to God for his benefits,¹ so that he may be praised through us,² so that we may be assured of our faith by its fruits,³ and so that by our godly living our neighbors may be won over to Christ.⁴ 1 Rom. 6:13; 12:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:5-10 2 Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 6:19-20 3 Matt. 7:17-18; Gal. 5:22-24; 2 Pet. 1:10-11 4 Matt. 5:14-16; Rom. 14:17-19; 1 Pet. 2:12; 3:1-2</p>

Question 1. How does God use His people as instruments in carrying out His purpose? What are we responsible to do?

Question 2. Who can you share the Gospel with this week? How can you pray for them?

Question 3. How can we model Jesus’ love to those around us by serving them?

By the time Gideon enters Biblical history, things have deteriorated tremendously in Israel. Because of their idol worship, they are now being oppressed by Midianites. The Israelites are forced to live in caves, their food is being plundered and the army of the Midianites is so vast that it seems as if they are like swarms of locusts devastating the land. Everywhere you look in Israel, there is a Midianite raiding and plundering. Israel needs a deliverer, and God chooses Gideon—a most unlikely choice. Look how Gideon describes himself in verse 15: “How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh (Gideon’s tribe), and I am the weakest in my family.” God picked a 98-pound weakling to deliver Israel! God always works through the humble to carry out His plan, because that way God will get all the glory that is due to Him.

The same is still true today. We are called to be humble because God works through the humble.

1 Peter 5:5-7 All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he reminded them of what they were before Christ came into their lives.

1 Corinthians 1:26 - 2:1 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

The same is true for all who desire to be saved and to serve Christ: we must recognize our weakness; we must come humbly to him and ask for his forgiveness and his strength in our lives. But we also must remember that even though we come to Christ in weakness, his power fills us and gives us strength.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

New City Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>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.</p>	<p>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</p>

Question 1. How would Gideon be able to defeat the Midianites (in whose strength)? How, likewise, are we able to do whatever God has called us to do? In whose strength must we work and rely on?

Yesterday we saw Gideon’s weakness and how that weakness and humility was the basis for God’s choice of Gideon to be Israel’s deliverer. Because of Gideon’s weakness, he would have to trust God and God alone would receive all of the glory. Now as Gideon gets ready to move forward and lead Israel in battle against the Midianites, God moves again to make sure that God alone will get the glory.

In an effort to be faithful to do what God had called him to do, Gideon raises a large army of 32,000 men. Even an army this large seemed to be no match for the Midianites. The Midianite army was so vast that, in verse 7, we are told that it was impossible to count how many of them there were, but there were so many they seemed like swarms of locusts. But in God’s eyes an army of 32,000 was still too big, so God gives Gideon several different ways to whittle down the size of his army. Before Gideon knows it, his army is down to just 300 men. Can you put yourself in Gideon’s shoes and think how he must have felt? He was already fearful of leading the Israelites, and now he would have to do it with just a tiny army of men. But understand why God was doing this. Look again at verse 2. God wanted Israel to know that He alone was the one who would save them.

Psalm 33:16-18 No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,

If Gideon and Israel were to be victorious it would only come by way of God’s hand. The same is true for us. Most of the time we are oblivious to how powerful our enemy Satan is, but Peter characterizes Satan as a powerful lion just waiting to pounce on us.

1 Peter 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

No matter how strong we think we are, we are no match for Satan. We need God to fight for us, and we should always be sure to give God all the glory for our spiritual victories.

Galatians 6:14 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

First Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
Question 61. What does it mean to believe in Christ? To trust in Christ alone for my salvation.	Q. 62. Why can’t our good works be our righteousness before God, or at least a part of our righteousness? A. Because the righteousness which can pass God’s judgment must be entirely perfect and must in every way measure up to the divine law. ¹ But even our best works in this life are imperfect and stained with sin. ² 1 Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:10 (Deut. 27:26) 2 Isa. 64:6

Question 1. How did humility factor in to Gideon’s victory of the Midianites? How does humility factor in to our victory over Satan?

Question 2. Where do we find true humility? What must we know about ourselves and what must be our primary focus to gain a heart of humility?

Samson was born in a miraculous way. Verse 2 tells us that Samson’s mother was considered to be sterile and unable to conceive a child. But then an angel appears to her and announces that she will indeed give birth to a son and tells her that this son will be born for a special purpose—to deliver Israel for her oppressors. By now maybe you have already made this connection, but do you see the similarity to Jesus’ birth? In a sense it was impossible for Mary to conceive. She was in a state of total disbelief when the angel came and told her that she would give birth to a son, because she had never been with a man.

Luke 1:26-34 God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

From birth Samson had been set apart to be used by God to be Israel’s deliverer. In the same way, Jesus was set apart from birth to be our deliverer.

Matthew 1:20-21 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

The name Jesus means Jehovah (Yahweh) is salvation. From the moment Samson was conceived, he was set apart to deliver Israel from the Philistines. In the same way, from the moment Jesus was conceived, he was set apart to deliver salvation to us and deliver us from our sins.

New City Catechism	Heidelberg Catechism
<p>Question 22. Why Must the Redeemer Be Truly Human? That in human nature he might on our behalf perfectly obey the whole law and suffer the punishment for human sin; and also that he might sympathize with our weaknesses.</p>	<p>Q. 35. What does it mean that he “was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary”? A. That the eternal Son of God, who is and remains true and eternal God,¹ took to himself, through the working of the Holy Spirit,² from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary,³ a truly human nature so that he might also become David’s true descendant,⁴ like his brothers and sisters in every way⁵ except for sin.⁶ 1 John 1:1; 10:30-36; Acts 13:33 (Ps. 2:7); Col. 1:15-17; 1 John 5:20 2 Luke 1:35 3 Matt. 1:18-23; John 1:14; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 2:14 4 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 132:11; Matt. 1:1; Rom. 1:3 5 Phil. 2:7; Heb. 2:17 6 Heb. 4:15; 7:26-27</p>

Question 1. How do we see God’s faithfulness to His people in raising up a deliverer despite human weakness and sinfulness? How does that give us increasing confidence in Him?

Yesterday, we considered how Samson and Jesus had both been called from birth to deliver their people from the oppression they faced. Today, we will see how differently they each lived out that call on their lives. You know the sad story of Samson. Judges 16 is just a sample of the way Samson lived out his calling. Samson never truly lived up to his calling or to the promise of being Israel’s deliverer. For Samson, life seemed to be a game to play—a constant testing to see how much he could get away with. Think how different Samson and Jesus are in the way they lived out their callings. Samson seems to always be focused on a good time, having his needs met and being comfortable. Jesus, on the other hand, was not concerned at all with the comforts of life.

Matthew 8:20 Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

Samson was more concerned with what he wanted than he was with what God wanted. Jesus lived his whole concerned with just one thing—doing the will of the Father.

John 6:38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

In a very real sense, Jesus was a slave to the will of the father, because he willingly gave up his rights, so he could do what God had sent him to do. Through Christ we have been set free from the power of sin, but we have been set free to serve the one who set us free.

First Catechism	Westminster Shorter Catechism
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. What other differences between Jesus and Samson can you see? Which one are you more like – Samson or Jesus? When recently have you acted like Samson? When have you sought your own comfort ahead of God’s will? Are you trying to live your life on the edge of obedience or seeking to completely obey the will of the Father like Jesus our savior? Read Romans 6:15-18.

In Judges 19 and 20 we read the sordid and sad tale of how the men of the tribe of Benjamin mistreated a Levite and his wife as they visited one of the towns belonging to the tribe of Benjamin. Because of this incident, the other eleven tribes of Israel went to war against the tribe of Benjamin to seek justice because of the way the woman had been defiled. Many from the tribe of Benjamin died because of the battle between the Israelites and the tribe of Benjamin. It was so bad that the tribe of Benjamin was almost wiped out. To keep that from happening, the other tribes of Israel devised schemes by which the men who remained from the tribe of Benjamin might be able to go and get wives for themselves. That is what we read about in Judges 21. But perhaps the most telling thing in this chapter is found in verse 25. “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.” The last verse of the Book of Judges is in many ways the theme verse for the whole book. Throughout the book of Judges, Israel is constantly being led off into sin, by their own evil desires, which results in judgment and God’s discipline. Without a king—a strong ruler—Israel was prone to fall into sin. The same is true for us. Without a strong king to lead us, rule over us, and subdue us, we too will constantly fall into cycles of sin which lead to God’s judgment in our lives. That is why we so desperately need Jesus—our great king.

Jesus sets the pattern for how we should live our lives.

Philippians 3:7-17 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. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

But as our king, Jesus not only sets the pattern for how we are to live, but he also gives us the power to live in a way that is pleasing to God.

2 Peter 1:2-8 Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

First Catechism

Question 75. Why do you need Christ as your king?
Because I am weak and helpless.

Question 1. Are you relying on Jesus for the power to love and serve God? When is a recent time that you haven’t? When is a recent time you have?

Because of the deaths of their husbands, Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah are in a desperate situation. In that culture at that time, a woman without any man in her life was in dire financial circumstances. Men were the ones who transacted business and made money. It was hard enough for Naomi that her husband had died, but when her two sons also died it meant there was no means of financial support for her and her daughters-in-law. Because of the financial distress that Naomi faced, she decided to return to her hometown of Bethlehem. The custom of her day would have had her two daughters-in-law go with her because they had become part of Naomi’s family through marriage. But Naomi offers and implores with them to stay in their homeland and find new husbands and start a new life. Initially, both daughters-in-law decide to accompany Naomi back to Bethlehem, but as they begin their journey Orpah decides to go back, and leaves Naomi and Ruth. But for no other reason other than love and loyalty, Ruth continues on by Naomi’s side and says, “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried.” And then Ruth confirms her promise by making an oath to Naomi, “May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.” As we will see over the next few days this is a life changing decision for Ruth, but it is also a beautiful picture of God’s covenant loyalty to us.

Just as Ruth voluntarily bound herself to Naomi through an oath, God voluntarily binds himself to us through an oath.

Hebrews 6:16-19 Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

This passage in Hebrews is referring back to the promise and the oath that God made to Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, and 17, but the writer of Hebrews makes it plain that it applies to us as well. Because just as Ruth’s covenantal loyalty bound her fast to Naomi, God’s covenant loyalty to us is the anchor for our souls, because it holds us fast to him.

But before we leave this, let’s notice one more thing. Ruth promised to follow Naomi even to her death. That is the ultimate covenant loyalty. It is again a picture of God’s covenant loyalty to us. To keep the promise that God has made to us through Abraham, God sacrificed himself (Jesus). To keep God’s promise, Jesus died the death we deserved to die, so that we might live and have that hope as an anchor for our soul firm and secure. That is why we can have the utmost confidence in all of God’s promises especially this one:

Deuteronomy 31:6 Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

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. 47. But isn't Christ with us until the end of the world as he promised us? ¹ A. Christ is true human and true God. In his human nature Christ is not now on earth; ² but in his divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit he is never absent from us. ³ 1 Matt. 28:20 2 Acts 1:9-11; 3:19-21 3 Matt. 28:18-20; John 14:16-19

Question 1. Discuss God’s faithfulness and provision, even in the midst of trials. How does it give us hope and confidence in His unfailing love?