

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## *Question 56*

Halifax, 9 November 2008

**Q. 56 How is Christ to be exalted in His coming again to judge the world?**

**A. Christ is to be exalted in His coming again to judge the world, in that He, who was unjustly judged and condemned by wicked men, shall come again at the last day in great power, and in the full manifestation of His own glory, and of His Father's, with all His holy angels, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, to judge the world in righteousness.**

### **Introduction:**

Tonight is our sixth and final sermon about the exaltation of Christ.

- The Larger Catechism gives us a very full picture of Christ as our Mediator...
  - All the way back in Q. 36, we were introduced to Him as the Mediator of the Covenant of Grace who came to save us...
    - From Question 36 – 42, it speaks of His nature and His titles...
    - And then from Question 42 to 56, it speaks of His work as our Mediator...

It is interesting to observe how Christ's work is laid out for us in a chronological fashion...

- So that in looking at His humiliation,
  - We first considered His conception and birth, then His life of poverty, then His suffering and death, and finally His burial...
    - These are all things that occurred in the history of the world about 2000 years ago...
- Then we came to His exaltation...
  - and first there was His resurrection three days after His death...
    - then His ascension forty days after His resurrection...
    - followed immediately by His sitting at God's right hand...His sitting to rule...
      - This is something that continues until His return at the end of the world,
        - for He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.
    - So this sitting at God's right hand is something that He began forty days after His resurrection and that continues to this day.

- And now we come to Question 56...
  - This question speaks of that in the work of Christ which is yet to come.
    - It speaks of what is yet future to us...
      - namely, His coming again to judge the world at the last day.

And I say, we should be very glad that this is yet future.

- It would be very disappointing if His mediation was complete...
  - Of course we are very glad that He has finished making atonement for our sins,
    - but He has not yet subdued all of His enemies, nor has He perfected us (we who believe).
  - And perhaps most importantly of all,
    - He has not yet fully revealed His glory in the earth...
      - We are therefore waiting for His glory to be fully revealed.
        - For those who are redeemed this will be the most wonderful event in all of history—an event without compare!
        - For those who are not redeemed, it will be the most horrendous event in all of history—an event without compare.

Let us now take some time to consider this great coming day of Christ's glory.

- Our Scripture reading is from Matthew 25:31-46.
  - READ> Matthew 25:31-46.

TRANS> As we begin tonight, I want you to consider first of all, that:

## **I. There is great injustice in the world that needs to be rectified.**

A. The great injustice that is in the world has to do with how men have treated the Son of God.

1. This injustice can be certainly deduced from Matthew 25...
  - because the Son of God is portrayed here as coming in His glory to sit on the throne of His glory.
    - This is the glory that He set aside when He came the first time in order that He might redeem us.
    - And because it was set aside, He did not show Himself to men in majesty and glory,
      - He even allowed them to treat Him shamefully and disrespectfully...

- in ways that were not at all appropriate to the honour that belongs to Him...
  - in ways that were repugnant to His majesty and glory.
2. It is obvious that when He was here the first time,
- He did not bring justice to those who wronged Him...
  - And it is obvious that He has not brought justice upon them even to this day...
    - Instead of showing Himself forth as a holy judge, His glory was concealed until the appointed time.
      - He, as it were, overlooked the wicked deeds of men and continues to do so until the appointed day when His glory will be seen...
        - On that day, He will show Himself as He is in relation to sin and sinners...
        - His holy justice will be brought to bear upon His enemies,
          - and the result will be everlasting fire.
  - That is the subject of Matthew 25:31-46.
    - “When the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.”
      - This has not yet taken place.
      - His glory is yet veiled until that great day that God has appointed.
  - Paul expresses this same idea when he speaks to the Greeks in Acts 17
    - **Acts 17:29-31: “Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”**
    - The appointed day is the day when the Son of Man will come in His glory.
      - He who has been shamefully treated through the ages of the human race will then be honoured.

TRANS> But let me show you the two ways that the Son of Man has been unjustly treated—

- horrendous wrongs that are yet to be rectified and will not be rectified until He comes in His glory on the appointed day.

B. First, there is the way He was treated in the Garden of Eden.

1. You must understand that the second Person of the Trinity is the Word of God...

- He is the member of the Trinity who (in particular) is revealed to us on earth.
  - He is the One by whom and through whom all things were created.
  - He is the One who walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.
  - He is the One who wrote His Law on their hearts so that they knew from the start that they were to love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, and their neighbour as themselves.
  - He is the One who instituted labour and marriage and the Sabbath from the very beginning.
  - He is the One who gave them permission to eat of the trees in the garden,
    - and who gave them the Tree of Life as a pledge of confirmation in life,
    - and who forbade them to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil as a test of their fidelity to Him as their Creator.
- Oh how good the Lord was to His creatures!
  - How kind and how gracious...
  - What blessings and what privileges He gave them...
    - Not only paradise with all its beauty, wonders, and delectable things...
      - not only companionship with one another with the power to reproduce themselves...
      - not only dominion over an earth that they could subdue...
    - But He even gave them the privilege of communion with Himself so that they could know Him and walk with Him...
      - He even gave them the Sabbath, completely set apart for them to commune with Him!
      - And each day, He walked with them in the cool of the day.
        - What privileges!
        - What blessings!

2. But what injustice that they should spurn Him—that they should reject Him and trample upon His covenant!

- That at the mere suggestion of the serpent,

- They should rise up in treasonous rebellion against the Lord of Glory, the Maker of heaven and earth, their benevolent, gracious, kind, Lord and Master!
- And this rejection of Him continues in all the idolatry,
  - all the unjust representation of Him in whom we live and move and have our being...
  - in the worship of other gods and in the idolatrous worship of the true God...
  - in the brazen way that men go on in their sin and wickedness as if they have no Maker and no Judge before whose watching eye not only their actions and words, but even their very thoughts are clearly seen...
    - It is a most shameful thing that we should treat Him as we do.
    - We can not plead innocent ignorance for this,
      - for God has clearly made known to us His majesty and glory...
      - and our ignorance is due to our suppression of what is clearly made known to us—
        - it is an obnoxious, rebellious ignorance...
        - Yes, we are blinded, but it is a wilful blindness at the roots.
          - When men complain that God does not make Himself known, they are only confessing their own wickedness in suppressing Him.
          - Our wickedness is great—much greater than we are capable of admitting.
- My friends, we do not begin to grasp the horror of what we did as a human race in that first fall!
  - We are all still living in this fallen world of darkness.
    - And even after our eyes are opened to see something of our sin by God's saving grace,
      - we are yet far from grasping the true demerit of our deed.
    - We are yet in a haze about it all, and we struggle with the justice of God even in the temporal judgements we bear in this world.
      - As transgressors who are part of a whole race of transgressors,
        - we are hardly in a position to make a responsible judgement.
  - I struggle to know how to represent the injustice of what we did...

- but perhaps the best way is to look at what the God of all justice has sentenced us with...
  - even grievous torment without intermission in the Lake of Fire forever.
  - He is the source of all true justice, and whatever sense of justice we have, we have from Him...
    - our awareness that it is wrong for us cheat others or to harm them without reason is from Him.
    - Even in the most depraved person, there is still some sense of justice...
      - and that sense is the foundation to understanding the injustice of our rebellion against the Son of God.
      - Take the sense of injustice and multiply it by 10,000 to gain some understanding of our demerit.

TRANS> The way we treated Him in the garden was truly reprehensible...

- It is an injustice toward the Lord that has not yet been rectified.
  - But there is an even greater injustice...

#### C. The injustice in the way we treated the Son of God when He came to redeem us.

1. God appointed Israel, in a sense, to represent the whole world as the welcoming committee to the Redeemer...
  - For hundreds of years the Lord spoke to them as His people,
    - showing them His inapproachable holiness in their fallen estate, yet promising them redemption from His own hand.
    - All along the way, He showed them His standard and showed them their need of a Saviour—
      - a Saviour represented to them in the sacrifices offered on the altar.
  - When the time came for the Son of God to appear, John the Baptist was sent forth to prepare the way by calling the people to repentance.
    - He was preparing them to welcome the Saviour of the world.
2. But you know what kind of reception they gave Him.
  - He went about doing good, but they officially condemned Him to be crucified.
    - They could not bear Him as a person because He was holy and they were wicked.
    - They could not tolerate Him.

- Such wickedness is unfathomable—to think that here is a Saviour, even the Creator, even the Son of God from Heaven,
    - coming to earth to give Himself up as a sacrifice to satisfy the holy justice of the Triune God so that we could be pardoned...
    - And to think that the wickedness of man was so great that rather than welcoming Him with eager love,
      - He was judged unfit to remain on the earth!
3. And you must not suppose that you are any different...
- It is in you by nature to do the very same thing...
    - The Saviour could appear to you in all His beauty, in all His grace and tender mercy, in His saving love as a Redeemer,
      - and you too would condemn Him, spit in His face, mock Him and crucify Him.
      - The same wickedness is in you.
        - It is only the grace of God that causes you to differ.
    - I say, even after that grace has opened your eyes and shown you who He is and changed your heart so that you love Him...
      - even still there is that remaining wickedness in you that keeps you from absolutely delighting in Him...
        - from having such an affection for Him that you entirely give yourself up to Him without any reservation!
        - There is still that dullness and that coldness that keeps your love for Him from rising to the heights to which it ought to rise.
    - And that remaining corruption in you is a testimony that the same spirit that led Israel to crucify Jesus is the stuff out of which you were made.
      - And we need only look around at those who are not redeemed...
        - And we can see their unjust thoughts toward this Saviour...
          - Such wicked unjust thoughts that they should raise objections and make excuses rather than melt in love as soon as He is presented to them...
        - To reject this One who came and gave Himself to be eternally cursed in order that sinners might be reconciled to the Him and to His Father...
          - This surely shows the depths to which our race has fallen.

TRANS> How could it be that we should treat one so wonderful as the Son of God with such scorn and contempt?

- What a grave injustice! What wickedness...
  - And yet the Lord lets it go on...
    - He does not bear down upon it immediately with fiery judgement and indignation...
    - This is a great injustice to be rectified,
      - and nothing will be right until it is.
  - The Son of God must be honoured and He will be honoured...
    - For God has appointed a day when He will judge the world in righteousness.
    - And that brings us to our next heading...

## **II. The great injustice that is now in the world will be rectified when Christ comes in His glory.**

A. Matthew 25:31-46 spells it out beautifully.

1. Over all the years of history, Christ has not dealt with mankind according to our sins...
  - The judgements that have fallen upon us in this world are only a small foretaste of the judgement that is to come.
  - They are, as it were, merciful reminders that we have a Judge in heaven,
    - but as they are not complete or uniform, they are also a reminder that there is a judgement yet to come...
      - and scripture informs us that it will come on the day that God has appointed for the Son of Man to return...
        - not in humiliation (as He did the first time), but in glory.
2. And you see how the offence is portrayed in Matthew 25...
  - It all has to do with the way the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, has been treated by men in the world...
    - And that treatment is seen in the way that those who follow Him and walk in His truth are treated...
      - He calls them here His brethren.
  - The Son of Man is now in heaven—He is out of the reach of men.
    - They cannot spit upon Him or crucify Him as they did when He was on earth.



- They cannot ignore Him or mock at Him directly...
- The only way they can show what they think of Him is in the way they treat His followers...
  - His followers who tell of Him and of what He has done...
    - How the message of His followers **ought** to be eagerly and even violently welcomed by all who hear it...
    - How it **would** be welcomed if the Son of God were honoured in the way He should be honoured.
- And so it is that when He judges the world, it is based on the way the world has neglected His followers...
  - When they complain that they have never neglected Him...
    - When they say,
      - **v. 44: ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’**
    - He will answer them, saying:
      - **v. 45: ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’**
- And you will note that He does not even mention the judgement and shameful treatment of His followers...the mocking or the persecution...only the neglect of them!
  - In v. 41, He says:
    - **Matt 25:41-43: “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.”**
  - It is not because His followers are so great,
    - It is because He is so great and so honourable and it is so unjust to be indifferent toward Him and His salvation—
      - It is an indifference that is utterly reprehensible and that brings down His indignation and wrath in all justice.
      - Things are not right until this horrendous injustice of neglecting the Son is addressed.
  - Now someone will say,

- “But what about those who have never even heard this message? Those who have never met the followers of Christ or been exposed to the message of redemption?”
- And I will respond to that...
  - The point of this passage is not that only those who have mistreated Christ’s followers will be judged,
    - It is that those who have shamefully treated Christ, in whatever way He has been revealed to them, will be judged in that day.
    - Those who have not heard the message of redemption will not be judged as severely as those who have...
      - but they will be judged for their idolatry and their worship of false gods when His eternal power and divine nature are clearly seen through the things He has made.
      - The point is, they will be judged for their failure to honour Him to whom all honour and glory belongs...
        - He who has been dishonoured through the ages will be honoured in that day!

B. Now let’s take a look at just how Christ will be honoured in that day—just how His glory will be shown.

1. I have already explained that it will be in bringing justice to bear upon those who have wronged Him...
  - His honour will be upheld because all the shameful treatment of Him will be addressed and clearly exposed...
    - And the wrong in it will be clearly seen by the punishment that will be brought against it.
  - There will be a kind of waking up to reality...
    - You know how this is—
      - You can start doing wrong and you sort of grow accustomed to it— you justify your behaviour and excuse it in various ways—
        - and if other people come along you sort of encourage each other along in it so that it seems okay...
        - This is what happened in Germany in the days of Hitler...
        - This is what happens in cannibalistic cultures...
        - This is what has happened in our culture with abortion...
          - You become blind to the wrong you are doing because we are such masters at self-justification.

- And we are even more accustomed as a part of our fallen race to accept the neglect of God as He is revealed to us in Christ through the ages as a thing that is not so bad...
    - blasphemy perhaps or murder, but a neglect of Him?
      - That is not such a bad thing, we suppose.
  - And you see, we will be woken up to see the kind of majesty and glory that rightly belongs to Christ—to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—revealed to us through Christ...
  - And we will see how wrong we have been to treat Him with less than the fullest honour...
    - We will understand what Romans 3:23 means when it says,
      - “All have sinned and come short of His glory.”
      - The idea of “coming short of His glory” will be impressed upon us in that day like never before,
        - because we will be brought face to face with the glory we have failed to honour!
2. And I tell you, what we have in Matthew 25 is the Son of God making clear to everyone the wrongs that have been done to Him in the world...
- a. When He has once done this, we will no longer struggle with the sentence that is passed against sinners...
    - Everlasting punishment will no longer seem unjust to us at all...
      - It will rather seem dreadfully wrong for anything other than everlasting punishment to be brought upon those who have not honoured the Son.
      - It will be something like the way it is
        - when a kid at school finally gives a bully what’s coming to him...
        - or when a sniper is finally apprehended...
      - No one is disappointed when justice is finally brought in such cases.
        - There is rather relief.
  - b. And on the day of judgement,
    - our sense of the wrongs that have been perpetrated against the Son of God will be heightened...
    - We will see how shamefully we have dealt with Him because we will see the honour that is appropriate to Him.

- Everything will be perfectly clear and the beauty of Christ and glory of Christ that we have been so dull to see will enrapture us beyond all expectation.
- c. This will be the greatest event in all history...
- At last Christ will be seen as He is.
  - At last He will receive the glory that is due to Him.
  - At last, everyone will know in the fullest extent that He is Lord.
    - For those who believe, it will a day of great rejoicing...
      - You will marvel that the Son of God should have made Himself an offering for a sinner like you.
      - You will realise how amazing His grace truly is.
    - And for those who rejected Christ in this world and did not believe,
      - There will such shame when the secrets of their hearts are revealed and the malignancy of their rebellion...
        - There will be no more room for self-justification or excuses...
        - All will be known and glory of Christ will be seen.

### **III. Knowing all this—knowing that this great day of judgement is coming—what manner of persons ought you to be?**

- A. First, you ought to make sure that you are ready for His coming—
- There is only one way to get ready for it...
    - And that is to repent of your sin and believe in Christ.
  - Your wrongful treatment of Christ, both as part of the fallen human race and as an individual,
    - must be made right...
      - And the only way you can make it right is by turning to Christ crucified and looking to His finished work on the cross—
        - you must look to Him to make it right...
  - If you do not rest upon Him,
    - If you are supposing that its not a big deal or not much needed,
      - You will have to satisfy for your own sins in that day...
      - You may not think it a big deal that you only neglected Christ,

- but you and everyone else will see to your horror what a big deal it really was when the glory of Christ is revealed.
- So be sure that you are found in Christ when that Day comes!

TRANS> That is the first thing you ought to do when you know that the judgement day is coming...

- Now, secondly, when you know that He is coming to reveal His excellent glory...

B. You ought to be persons who yearn to see the glory of Christ now—

1. Jesus said that the very essence of eternal life was to “know the Father and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.”
  - He prayed that you would come to see the glory that He had with the Father before the world was created...
  - And if you are in Christ, you will come to see it.
2. But now you have the privilege to become acquainted with Him through the revelation of the cross...
  - Here you see His justice, that demanded so great a sacrifice...
  - His love, that provided it...
  - His wisdom, that marvellously planned it all...
  - His wrath that fell upon Christ.
3. And I say, if you believe that you shall see His glory,
  - you will be eager to see it and to understand it now as much as you possibly can!
  - You will want to draw near to Him and know the fellowship of His sufferings and power of His resurrection
  - You will want to grow in your appreciation of what He has done in order that you might have an even greater joy when He appears in His glory.

TRANS> And thirdly,

C. If you are in Christ, you ought to be persons who live as those who know that you will give an account and be rewarded in grace.

1. The day of His appearing will be the harvest day.
2. It will be then that the fruit will be gathered in—
  - Now is the time to grow that fruit in preparation.