

## **FATHER PROVIDES WHAT I NEED**

Text: Psalm 56; Luke 12:22-34

Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 9#2

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What is the difference between 'want' and 'need'? I am using the following definitions. 'Want' is something I would like to have, something I desire, I enjoy. 'Need' is something I must have. It is essential for survival or growth. For example, children may often want ice cream and lollies. But they need vegetables. And if we as parents are going to do a good job then we will make sure they get what they need. Our children will complain at times if they are made to eat vegetables. It could take my children about 20 minutes to slowly get through a few vegetables with much coaxing. It took less than five minutes to devour their ice cream. Our kids will not always see the value in what we are doing by getting them to eat vegetables. But they will just have to trust us in that. If we simply gave in to our children we would have some very unhealthy, obese children. So we give them what they need even if they do throw a tantrum. They are going to have to learn to trust us as their parents. They will have to trust that we do love them and will do what is best for them.

It is like that between us and God. I wonder if all of us have that trust in our Father in heaven. As the Catechism says *"I trust him so much I do not doubt he will provide whatever I need..."* Sometimes after a good sermon or a heart stirring song we really feel 'Yes! Yes, I trust God'. But come Monday, with the hassles still there at work, getting the finances right is still a struggle, some more strong words were had with your spouse, then it can be different. Then we can have trouble saying *"I trust...God...will provide whatever I need."* 'I trust him?' Yes it is easy to say when all goes well. But what about when the doctor's report comes back 'I am sorry... but.. it doesn't look good.' Do we still trust then? Without Doubt? Often in those situations we look at ourselves and what we wanted in life. We look at the things we aspired to. We think of

our hopes, our ambitions and dreams now shattered and broken, And we begin to doubt. We begin to think 'Our Father in heaven is not providing. Why? Why is he failing us?'

But then the Catechism gently admonishes that aching heart and questioning mind. 'Is God failing you? We believe in a faithful God who keeps his promises. But what did he promise?' Note again the Catechism. *"He will provide what I need"* or as the old version says it *"...whatever is necessary..."* Remember the difference between want and need? Our children may want ice cream but they need vegetables. The trouble is if they have ice cream all the time, they begin to see it as a need. They come to expect it. In our Western culture we have come to expect many things. Like a good looking partner, wearing the latest designer clothes, healthy, bright children (1.8 of them), our own new home, two cars, a his and hers, good health and little emotional problems. And we would probably be shocked and dismayed to realise that God may not think it necessary for us to have all these. He may see many of these things as a want. An extravagant want even. Not a real need.

But, whereas we might get a shock, in our world billions would not be surprised at this. They praise the Lord they survived another day and have some food in their belly and some form of shelter. These people can hurt just as much over their struggles as we do, and more. But they know better the difference between want and need. One newspaper article says the Indian children gathering a living of a few dollars a week from the rubbish tips are more content than the kids in England with their over-worked never-at-home-parents and their iPads and smart phones. Many of us in Australia live a life that is well beyond what we need. But we receive it so regularly that we regard it as standard. Then when God at times gives us only what we need, when he holds back the extras, then we doubt his goodness.

But that is not fair. God never promised us all happiness in this sinful world. He never said that evil would not reach us. He never promised there would be no suffering or pain and turmoil. Given the broken world we live in we should expect suffering at some point. As C.S. Lewis put it in his book 'The Problem of Pain', 'The real problem is not why some pious, humble, believing people suffer, but why some do not.' In fact the Catechism goes so far as to say that God 'sends' the adversity to us. Did you notice what it says: *"...he will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends me..."* That does

not mean God schemes up suffering and hurt for us. Sin and its consequences are our responsibility. A lot of suffering comes from our own attitudes and actions. Or it comes down through the generations from our parents and grandparents. Or it comes from the result of the curse of sin on the creation. But the Catechism reflecting the Bible recognises that God is sovereign. That somehow, beyond our understanding, God has everything in his control. As Paul wrote in Romans 8:28 & 35 *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who have been called according to his purpose...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or sword?"* Suffering is not just the outcome of chance. The world is not a meaningless chaos. Despite how it looks and feels, it is in the control of God. Remember this is not naive pie-in-the-sky arm chair theology. The context of the writing of this Catechism answer we saw last week was in the midst of terrible persecution. The Catechism notes that this is a *"sad world"*. The old version described it as *"a vale of tears"*. The Catechism is down to earth and very real. Yet in the midst of suffering it acknowledges that God is in control. And as such he can turn adversity to our good. And so, in a sense, he 'sends' it to us. He sends it for our growth and good. God sends whatever is necessary. He sends *"...whatever I need for body and soul..."*

Now it becomes clear that God's view of what we need can be different to ours. He may regard it as more limited compared to what we want. But while God's view, at a certain time, may be more limited than our view, we can be assured he will provide all of what we need. As the Catechism says *"... he will provide whatever I need for body and soul."* Or as the old version put it *"...he will provide all things necessary for body and soul."* So we should not expect more than God promises. Be we should not expect less either. Note again that answer *"...he will provide whatever I need for body and soul."* That emphasis on *"body and soul..."* gives us the clue as to how God determines our need. God sees our needs not only according to our material needs and health in this life on earth. He also sees our needs in terms of our spiritual life and eternal life on the new earth. He sees beyond our daily problems to far greater things. And he succeeds where we so often fail. How often haven't we as parents provided well for our children physically, but forgotten their souls. We have overlooked the spiritual aspect of life. We worked hard to ensure they went to good schools. We provided for nice clothes and a bedroom full of toys. But we forgot to teach our children how to pray and read the Bible. We didn't teach them how to trust our Father in heaven and not just the

extent of our credit cards. We didn't demonstrate how to cling to Jesus for forgiveness and live for him. We often provide only part of what they need. Like our culture and advertising stress the material, the physical, so often that is all we think of.

But God provides for all our needs. And sometimes what we need for the sake of our soul and salvation is suffering. The suffering may be brought on by our sin or the world's injustice. But it is used by God, it is "*turned to our good*", as it throws us off our proud attitudes and forces us to look at God and humbly rely on our Father. C.S. Lewis makes the remark that 'Pain insists on being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.' Lewis also was not an armchair theologian. He watched his wife die of cancer. Lewis went on to say 'The human spirit will not even begin to try to surrender self-will as long as all seems to be well with it. Now error and sin both have this property, that the deeper they are the less their victim suspects their existence. They are masked evil. Pain is the unmasked, unmistakable evil. Every man knows that something is wrong when he is being hurt.' In Australia we have lived so well for so long, we don't see a need for God anymore. We can do it all ourselves. We don't recognise the error and sin in our thinking. Suffering and pain unmask that attitude.

Now we will be hurt a lot by our suffering. It will leave deep emotional scars as well as physical scars. And it needs to be admitted that often such suffering drives people away from belief in God. That happens if they no longer see the enormous grace of God as expressed in Jesus. Suffering can help us grow spiritually only if we hang on, recognising that God is our greatest good. If we drop our faith in God because of our suffering we end up with what the atheist Richard Dawkins said. In a world where there is no god and neither good nor evil then there is just 'blind, pitiless indifference'. Or as Ecclesiastes put it so succinctly "*It's meaningless, utterly meaningless*".

We need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. We need to remember him on the cross suffering for our sin, God's gift of love, giving his everything to bring us into his family. Where we respond to suffering with humility we will be brought closer to our God and our faith and trust will be increased. God gets our attention through pain and we become less self sufficient. Our humility is important to God because then we really see and experience God for who he is. God wants us to find him in all his glory, because when we do we will find real freedom. There is no greater struggle for us humans as

always wondering if we are good enough. Can we manage on our own? How do people see us? But when we truly find God in all his awesome wonder all that fades away. We are truly free. St Augustine said 'God wants to give us something, but cannot because our hands are full- there's nowhere for him to put it.'

To see God's grace think about it this way. What is the lasting value of having no problems or pain and everything you want in this life only to suffer forever in the agony of hell? Saying that may not necessarily make your present pain any lighter. But it does give the suffering meaning, and a purpose and thus hope. God is providing us with what we need so that our lives are refined and purified (1 Peter 1:7) *"like gold is refined by fire."* God is making sure that we who are his children do not lose our *"...unfading crown of glory..."*, as Peter says in 1 Peter 5, *"...so that after we have suffered a little while, the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish and strengthen you..."* That verse of Peter reminds me of the play 'Shadow Lands'. It's a play about the life of C.S. Lewis and the suffering he went through watching his wife die of cancer. The theme of the play is that this world is a shadow land. It is not all there is but a shadow of the things to come. C.S. Lewis said we often forget that. We forget the eternal perspective. We are too narrow in our thinking and don't see the big picture. And that is where suffering is good. It takes us from the shadows to the greater thing. It takes us to the eternal. For it makes us look again at God where there is the real living without sin. For we do not really know life unless we know God.

I want to close with the illustration about a friend, years ago. He was an average Christian. He had a lot going for him, wife, new house, growing business. While I was at theological college I had not seen him for a few years. Then I heard the bad news he had cancer. He had several operations, cutting out large cancerous sections. He suffered badly under the chemo therapy. All his hair was gone. His body deformed. The church was praying for him but there was no improvement. We went to our home church during a college break and attended the Lord's Supper. It was in the traditional Reformed way of sitting together at a long table. We ended up sitting next to our friend. I was deeply moved. For I had never seen before, nor since, a person so enjoying the Lord's Supper. His face was radiant. He was celebrating. I had been asking God why he had to suffer. 'Why do you give this to him?' At the table I answered my own question. For I prayed 'Lord I wish I had his faith.' That is the wonder of God's grace.

*"He will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends me in this sad world. He is able to do this because he is Almighty God. He desires to do this because he is a faithful father." So trust him. Trust him so much that you "...do not doubt he will provide whatever you need for body and soul."*

## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

*These questions can be followed up personally, with a Christian friend, in your small groups, or in discussion after the service. Reflection is important because too often we hear a good sermon and soon forget it without actually growing spiritually or changing in attitude or what we do. The reflection questions are meant to be challenging, because our spiritual growth and the salvation of others is so important.*

- Define 'want' and 'need'. What is the difference? Why is it important to know the difference?
- What has God promised and not promised in terms of 'want' and 'need'? How much of what we have in Australia is 'want' or 'need'?
- What does it mean that God will provide 'whatever I need for body and soul'? In what areas of our lives does God provide in our lives where too often we fail?