

I BELONG TO JESUS

Text: Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 1
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I want to ask you the most important question you will ever face: *"What is your only comfort in life and in death?"* In other words what enables you to endure life and face death unafraid? This question gets to the heart of where every human being struggles. It's like a person looks you straight in the eye and says 'Let's get real honest. How do you look at life? How do you cope with it? What gives your life hope? The word 'comfort' in the question is not referring to how you get comfortable. Too often getting comfortable is our way of not being real honest about this question. A fellow called Ursinus, who was a professor of theology, helped write the Catechism. He defined comfort as *'A certain conclusion of the mind, whereby we place some good thing over against a certain evil which we experience, by the thought of which we ease the grief and patiently bear the evil.'* So comfort is a thing or mindset that helps us cope with a bad situation. It may not take the bad away but makes us strong enough to endure it. This is also a lifestyle issue. How do you live so that you cope, so that life gives joy? A couple of weeks ago Ian preached on suffering. That arose out of some personal tough stuff. But even in ordinary life we can struggle with the everyday grind of work and paying off the mortgage. What sort of lifestyle do you have that keeps you going? Is it about the weekend, the chance to be with mates and share a beer? The Catechism starts this way because when it was written in the 16th century it was a bad time in Europe. A religious struggle between Catholic and Protestant countries had been smouldering for 50 years before flaring into what was called the 'Thirty Years War' in Europe. War meant husbands and sons were killed. Wives and daughters were raped. Crops and communities were destroyed. It was a time of drought and also the plague. You can imagine people wondering how they could cope in such hard times.

Now this question is not just a history lesson or armchair theological discussion. It's not something you can be indifferent about. I am looking you in the eye and asking: *'What is your only comfort in life and in death?'* Dead seriously, what do you live for? If we looked at everything you did what would it say about the point to your life, what gives hope, what helps you cope? You younger people: you have things to look forward to, study, work, adventures; goals to achieve. Tell me what will be the basis for what you do? What will you hang on to if some things do not go as you hoped? You older folk: you've had good times and not so good. How did you cope? How is your health? What is the basis for your future? Can we speak of a future if you're over 80 and you've got a bad heart? Mums and dads with the kids, what's the point to all your running around? What keeps you going when sickness threatens, when the bottom falls out of the business or you've been made redundant? What keeps you going when it gets hard to live with your spouse, when the children disappoint you, or you can't face yourself another day? Do you get the question? When we get serious with this question it makes us realise that so many of our so called comforts, be it the wine we enjoy, or the latest smart phone, that holiday you have dreamed of, they are nice, but they don't cut it for the big life question. That's why the question is *'What is your only comfort in life and in death?'*

When we look at the answer we see it is striking! *"That I am not my own, but belong- body and soul, in life and in death- to my faithful saviour Jesus Christ."* We live in a world where we expect to find security in possessions, pride, power, position. But here we see our only, true comfort comes from the fact that we don't even belong to ourselves! That is so countercultural and counterintuitive. We can cope with disappointment in life and face death without fear of judgement, not because of what we have done or what we own or who we are, but because of what we do not possess, our selves. Can you sense the grace in that? How do we manage life: we belong to Jesus! Now this does not sit well in our Aussie culture where each person is free to do his own thing. We have the right to live however we please, as long as we don't step on another person's rights. To say 'I am not my own but belong to another' would be deemed as slavery. In fact that is a correct assessment. The Catechism is quoting Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 *"You are not your own; you were bought at a price"*. That is slave market language! But rather than being upset by it the Catechism sees it as something wonderful. Why? Because it understands what the Bible teaches about sin. If I am master of myself then I am actually a slave to myself. I am a slave to my own

broken sinful nature, enslaved to my own passions and addictions. In our broken sinful condition we are our own worst enemy. Too much of what causes us concern in life comes from our own doing. We keep arguing with people because of our temper. We have health issues because we drink too much. We say 'I am free, I am my own boss' but in fact we are slaves to our sinful nature. The Bible argues that when I am slave to Jesus then I am really free. Now that sounds contradictory doesn't it? Some one will ask 'you're a slave, so you are bound, right, bound to follow what some one else says. Yet you say you are free. How does that work?' Well, we need to make a distinction between being bound or unbound and being free. [POWER POINT PICTURE] For example a fish in water is free though it is bound to the water. If that fish (let's call it philosophish) were to say 'Hmmm, I do not want to be bound to the water anymore. I'm going to break all ties and do my own thing. I'm going to go on the land and go wild for a while'. You know what will happen. It's not long before he gasps for breath and dies. He lost his freedom when he stepped out of his element. [POWER POINT PICTURE] Or think of a train. After Christmas Liz and I took most of our kids and grandchildren on the Puffing Billy. It runs freest when it stays bound to its tracks. If it jumps the tracks it tips over and is wrecked. It's only in one of the children's story books that a train can go off its tracks and 'tip toe through the tulips'. When we belong to Jesus we are brought back to our right element, we are brought back on track. Jesus brings us back to God. He reconciles us with the one who made us, to whom we belong. Being in a relationship with God we begin again to function as we were meant to function. We know our place, we know the meaning to life, we know about the best way to live. And we have hope for what comes after life. We have freedom when we belong to Jesus because he deals with our sin. This is so important because it is sin that makes life so hard. It is sin that is the underlying cause to all our problems. Sin is that rebellion against God where the human race wants to be 'unbound' by what God wants. Thing is, when we go against the laws or boundaries that God has set in creation then, of cause, everything goes wrong. The comfort we have from belonging to Jesus is not that from now on everything will be perfect. We said the 'comfort' we have helps us cope with life. Jesus has not yet taken away the consequences of sin like pain and suffering. In time he will! But Jesus has dealt with the cause of all our suffering. And therein lays our comfort.

Now for a thing to provide comfort the good thing must enter our consciousness so fully that the awareness of the good defeats the pain of the bad. So let's look at what

it means that we are not our own but belong to Jesus. First we see that Jesus *"has fully paid for all my sin with his precious blood"*. So no matter what you might be going through, as one who belongs to Jesus, that tough stuff is not God punishing you for your wrong. That will never be the case because Jesus has 'fully paid for all [your] sin'. You might be struggling with the consequences of your actions, but it is not God punishing you. So you don't have to drive yourself into the ground with the overwhelming weight of guilt. Not as far as God is concerned. All the things you have done wrong in your life, your failures towards God, your parents, your spouse, your children as far as God is concerned it has been dealt with. You may need to resolve stuff with others, but not God. As far as God and you are concerned you are free. You are forgiven. Jesus has paid *"with his precious blood"*. When he died on the cross and suffered hell he took all the punishment on himself. The truth of that is something we need to be clear about if it is to bring comfort. Far too often God has forgiven us but we still keep being in fear of God and of not being good enough. Secondly our comfort is that *"I have been set free from the tyranny of the devil"*. The devil does not control you. You do not have to submit to the power of your sinful nature. You do not have to bicker and fight. You do not have to demand your own way, or sulk and leave, or whatever it is you still do. We belong to Jesus. We have his Spirit. And with the power of the Spirit we can begin to be different. You can desire to do good as God wants. You can strive to follow a Godly lifestyle. You belong to Jesus. You are his servant. There is hope for change. Do you know that, does it inspire you and provide comfort and hope? Thirdly our comfort is that *"He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven: in fact, all things must work together for my salvation."* Even though there is sin and brokenness in the world and so much that goes wrong, you can know that Jesus is in control. No matter what happens in life, the work hassles, sickness, even death, you can be comforted by the fact that it's all in God's hands. Nothing is chaos and random evil, nothing happens without God's will. Not even a hair falling from your head. That's why when we belong to Jesus we can handle life. And we can handle death because it is no longer the end but a transformation, our continuation of eternal life with Jesus. Jesus owns you *"body and soul, in life and death."* By his resurrection Jesus has conquered death and has set us free from its terror.

Now again, how fully aware are you of all of this. To provide comfort we need to be very clear about what we have. Not just as a something we know as a fact, something

we may even have memorised. It has to saturate our being. It has to be at the forefront of our thinking at home and work and on the footy oval. Now here again is where Jesus helps us. *"Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him."* You see that? Because you belong to Jesus God sees you as forgiven and as perfect as Jesus and so his Spirit makes you his home. What does he do there? He assures you of what Jesus has done for you, that you are forgiven and God's child. As Paul wrote on Romans 8 *"You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the spirit of adoption. And by him we cry 'Abba, Father'. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."* How do you know that you belong to Jesus? How do you know that all the comfort we have just spoken about is for you? The Spirit prompts you and whispers in your heart that you belong to Jesus. He prods you to read your Bible and see again the wondrous gospel of grace. He is the one who stirs you to take hold of your comfort, to take hold of all Jesus has done for you. He is the one who makes you willing and ready to live for Jesus. He is the one who puts the burden on our hearts to bring the joy of our comfort out to our communities. If Jesus is the only real comfort in life then there are thousands in the Hills who need to know about it. There are millions in Australia and billions around the world who need this comfort as badly as we do.

Let me end where I began. Let me look you in the eye and ask you, honestly, what is your comfort in life? What helps you through the day? Do you just want to do your own thing? Are you relying on some material crutch or an addiction to ease the pain? Or do you confess that your comfort, your joy and consolation in life, and in death, is that you are not your own but that you belong to Jesus? Be honest. It's the most important question you need to come to terms with. And we will need to have a good answer if we are going to help provide Hope in the Hills.

LETS STAND AND RECITE LORD'S DAY 1

LORD'S SUPPER

[POWER POINTS]