Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Answer 37 says that “Christ sustained in body and soul the anger of God against the sin of the whole human race.” And I’m wondering if you noticed that last phrase as we read it through earlier? “The sin of the whole human race.” Because if you know anything about Reformed theology, you will have heard of the acronym TULIP, which stands for the parts of what we call the doctrines of grace. And can one of you tell us what the L of TULIP stands for? Limited Atonement. It is the belief that Christ’s suffering on the cross was limited, meaning that it was not for *every* human being but only for the elect or chosen of God. So, how does that reconcile with this phrase in Answer 37?

Well, we are going to consider that as we focus today on the suffering of the Lord Jesus. We want to think about the suffering of Christ, not just on the cross but during His whole life. And we want to do so *devotionally*; we want to see how His suffering reveals His amazing love for His people. And one of the ways that the Lord Jesus speaks about His people is as His sheep. In John 10, He described himself as the Good Shepherd and His people as His sheep. And it's a very beautiful and intimate metaphor. So, with that metaphor in mind, our two points will be **the suffering shepherd** and **the saved sheep**. And these headings will help us see what the suffering of the Lord Jesus actually accomplished.

1. So, let’s begin with **the Suffering Shepherd**.
   1. Last Sunday our focus was Lord’s Day 14 and the line of the Apostles’ Creed that says in relation to the Lord Jesus that He was, “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.” And the next line of the Apostles’ Creed, the one which is our focus today, says, “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified.” And you might very well be wondering, What about the rest of His life? Why is that not in the Creed? Or to put it another way, as many have done before, How come the Creed goes from ‘**womb to tomb’**? And it's a fair question. If you picked up a biography of anyone else and all it told you was where and when he or she was born and how and when he or she died, you would wonder if the middle chapters of the book had fallen out perhaps! What about the rest of their life? Where is all that information?
   2. Well, the Gospels do give us some information about the life of Jesus. There is one episode from when He was 12 years old, and we have some information about the last three years of his life, which was the time of His public ministry. We read about His travels and His miracles and His sermons during that time. But even during that time, Jesus regularly predicted His death and resurrection. And His travels had that as their focus; His arriving in Jerusalem and His leaving Jerusalem were all about creating the environment that would ultimately bring about His death and resurrection. But a major chunk of the Gospels is about the last week of His life and His death and resurrection.
      1. One commentator has done the math for us:

*Nine of the twenty eight chapters in Matthew deal with the last week of Jesus' life – the events leading up to His execution, His death on a cross, and His resurrection from the dead. Passion Week [which is what we call this week - AH] accounts for six of Mark's sixteen chapters, six of Luke's twenty-four chapters, and nine of John's twenty one chapters. So out of eighty-nine chapters in the four Gospels, thirty (one-third) are about the climatic final week of Jesus' life.*

*If we figure Jesus was thirty-three years old when He died, He lived around 1,700 weeks. And His four biographers spend a third of their time on only one of those weeks. Have you ever read a three-hundred page biography where one hundred pages dealt with the subject's death? Not even for Abraham Lincoln, John Kennedy, or Martin Luther King Jr. do we have such lopsided attention paid to the end of the story. But for Jesus, the ending of His life is the story.*

* 1. And that is the key, right there: “*For Jesus, the ending of His life is the story*.” And the Lord Jesus made this clear Himself. Earlier I mentioned **John 10** where Jesus refers to Himself as the Good Shepherd and His people as His sheep. Three times in that passage, He said, “*I have come to lay down my life for the sheep*.” In **Matthew 20:28**, He said, I “*came … to give [my] life as a ransom for many*.” He came to die. Now, that does not mean that His birth and His miracles are not important. We have seen in recent weeks that every aspect of His life is important to fulfill Old Testament prophecy, to reveal Him as truly human, truly righteous, and true God, and to fill us with an eager expectation for the new heavens and new earth, where there will no longer be death or disease or dysfunction. But He came to die for the forgiveness of sins.
     1. And this is how the gospel is summarized in Scripture; the focus is always His suffering and death and resurrection. **1 Peter 3:18**, “*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God*.” **Romans 10:9**, “*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved*.”
     2. And this is why the suffering and death and resurrection of Christ should be the grand theme of preaching: In **1 Corinthians 1 and 2**, Paul said, “*We preach Christ crucified*,” and “*For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*.” And he described preaching as “*the word of the cross*.”
     3. And even though we read the accounts of His suffering and crucifixion throughout the year, just as have done today, we also use **Easter** as a time to deliberately and meditatively focus on His suffering, death, and resurrection.
  2. **Now, none of this is to suggest that the suffering of Jesus began on the night of His crucifixion**. Our Lord’s Day puts it this way: By suffering we understand “that during His whole life, but especially at the end, Christ sustained, in body and soul, the anger of God against the whole human race.” Catechism students, do you remember the names of the authors of the Catechism? Caspar Olevianus and Zacharius Ursinus. And one of them, **Ursinus**, wrote a commentary on the Catechism. And He identifies **seven parts to the suffering of the Lord Jesus**:
     1. First, He gave up the joys of His previous existence in heaven.
        1. One reality TV show is called, rich house, poor house. And in the show, a rich family swaps homes with a poor family. So, they go from a mansion with a swimming pool and entertainment room and every creature comfort you can imagine to a squalid 2 bedroom apartment. And some of the rich people just can’t handle this new life; they miss the privileges of their old home too much.
        2. Well, Jesus left behind perfect fellowship with the Father and the Spirit, the constant worship and adoration of the angels, and their instant and glad willingness to do His bidding, in order to come down here to this.
     2. Second, He experienced all the infirmities or weaknesses of our human nature, except for sin.
        1. The One by whom all things were created was now hungry, thirsty, tired, sad, lonely, and dependant on others.
        2. It is becoming increasingly common for us to live to a ripe old age but for those later years to be plagued by dementia. And so, someone who was once fit and healthy can no longer do simple things like feed themselves or get dressed or go to the toilet. And if you are like me, that is an awful thing to contemplate, isn’t it. Well, it gives us an idea of why living on earth as a human was a part of the suffering of the Lord Jesus.
     3. Third, He knew deprivation and poverty.
        1. In other words, He who is the King of glory had to go without. In **Matthew 8:20**, He said, “*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*.”
     4. Fourth, He endured insults, treacheries, slanders, blasphemies, rejection, and contempt.
        1. Our earlier reading in **Isaiah 53** puts it like this: “*He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not*.” Think of Judas, His close friend, *betraying* Him. And how did he betray Him? With a kiss! The Pharisees said he was insane and accused Him of being a servant of the devil! In **Mark 3:21**, after a crowd had gathered at His home, such that He and His disciples could not eat, we read, “*And when His family heard it, they went out to seize Him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."*”
        2. Do you remember the pain of being bullied or made fun of or betrayed of falsely accused? It hurts, doesn’t it. Deeply! Well, that was Jesus’ regular experience.
     5. Fifth, He faced temptations from the devil.
        1. We are told of the three specific and intense temptations of the devil in **Matthew 3**, but **Hebrews 4:15** says that in “*every respect [Jesus] has been tempted as we are, yet without sin*.” For you and me, as sinners, temptation is almost like the air we breath, as is, far too often and regretfully, giving in to temptation. But for sinless Jesus, every temptation was like a knife thrust or a foul stench or a foreign invader.
     6. Sixth, He died a shameful and painful death.
        1. And we read this earlier. The crown of thorns. Being beaten and whipped. The death of a common criminal. Bloodied and torn. Nailed to the cross. Naked and stared at by all. The glare of the sun. The dust in His wounds. A terrible thirst. Each breath was torture. And all the while He was being mocked and ridiculed.
     7. And seventh, He experienced the bitter anguish of soul as one accursed of God and forsaken by His heavenly Father.
        1. And it was this that drew from the cry, “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*” Father, why do you not drive away from me such severe anguish and torments?
        2. And this spiritual agony was worse than the physical agony. Other human beings have been tortured and have suffered cruel and painful deaths, but no one has suffered the eternal wrath of His beloved Father in heaven.

And it is this that makes His suffering on the cross the pinnacle of His suffering and the very heart of the Gospel. For this is Him suffering the hell that we deserve to suffer because of our sins. This is what was needed for us to be set free from condemnation and to enjoy eternal life. This is His amazing love.

1. But I want you to just hold that thought for a moment as we spend a few moments on our second heading, which is the **Saved Sheep**.
   1. At the beginning of the sermon, I referred to that line in Answer 37 that tells us that “Christ sustained in body and soul the anger of God against the sin of the whole human race.” And I asked how we reconcile that phrase with the doctrine of Limited Atonement? And two words help us here; they are **sufficient** and **efficient**. Let me explain: The suffering of Christ on the cross was sufficient for the sins of the whole human race. This means that there was nothing lacking in the suffering of Jesus. It is not a case of if He had only suffered for longer or harder or deeper, or shed more blood, that more people could have been saved. No, because He lived a perfect life and because He is the perfect sacrifice, His suffering was sufficient or enough to cover the sins of everyone who ever lived. But it was **efficient only for the elect**. This means that it was only ever intended to cover or take away the sins of the elect and to secure eternal life for them.
      1. And this is the very plain teaching of Scripture:
         1. **Matthew 1:21**, Joseph was told to call Him Jesus, because “*He will save His people from their sins*.” Not every human being, but “His people.”
         2. **John 6:37**, “*All that the Father gives me will come to me*.” Not everyone will come to Him but only those whom the Father has given Him. **John 17:1-2**, says the same thing: “*Father … glorify your Son … since, you have given Him authority* … *to give eternal life to all whom you have given Him*.”
         3. **John 10:11-14**, “*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep … I know my own and my own know me.*” Jesus is not the shepherd of every human being but of His own sheep.
         4. **John 15:13**, “*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends*.” Christ did not lay down His life for every human being but for “His friends.”
         5. And in **Acts 20:28**, Paul speaks about “*the church of God, which [Jesus] obtained with His own blood*.” It is not for every human being that Jesus shed His blood, but for “the church of God.” And we see the same in **Ephesians 5:25** where husbands are commanded to love their wives, “*as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her*.” Who does Christ love and for whom did He give Himself up? His bride, the church.
      2. So, the suffering of Christ was **efficient** to forgive the sins of all God’s elect, the people of Christ, all those whom the Father had given Him, His friends, His Sheep, the church, His bride. Limited Atonement is the teaching of Scripture. But the authors of the Catechism referred to the sin of the whole human race to emphasize the **sufficiency** of Christ’s suffering. We must never think that there was something missing or lacking in what He suffered. It was so profound and deep and agonizing that it was *sufficient* to cover the sin of the whole human race.
   2. And brothers and sisters, **here is why this distinction matters**. It is my duty to preach Christ crucified to you today. In other words, I must proclaim the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. So, what is the gospel? Is it Jesus Christ suffered and died to make salvation *possible* for any who will believe? Or is it that Jesus Christ suffered and died to actually save sinners. Do you see the difference? Let me put it another way: Did Christ’s suffering make it possible for sinners to be reconciled to God if they believe, or Did Christ’s suffering actually reconcile sinners to God? Or, to put it in its simplest form, does the suffering of Christ make us saveable or does it actually save us? Do you see the difference? It’s *really* important! You see, if Jesus died to make salvation possible for every human being who might believe, then the core and heart of salvation is our belief. We are saved *by our believing*. It is when we believe that our sins are washed away, and we are reconciled to God. But that is not the gospel. The gospel is that Jesus suffered and died for His sheep on the cross: He took our shame and guilt on Himself; By His wounds, we were healed; He gave us peace with God. When He said, from the cross, “*It is finished*,” what He meant was that He had done everything necessary to completely save \_\_\_\_list some names\_\_\_\_ Father, the salvation of all my sheep is finished.
      1. Now, must you and I believe this in order to be saved? Of course! But it is not your believing that has taken your sin away and reconciled you to God, it is Christ’s suffering! And it was done on the cross! He did not make your salvation possible there, He saved you!
      2. And every time you give in to temptation and fall into sin, that is what you must remember. I am not saved by my believing. I am not saved by my efforts to not sin. I am saved by the suffering and death of Christ on Calvary’s cross. “It is finished.”

O beloved people of God, all praise to our Good Shepherd, who did not just make salvation *possible*, but who lay down His life for the sheep. Amen? Amen.