

New City Catechism

Question 24: Why was it necessary for Christ, the Redeemer, to die?

Answer: Christ died willingly in our place to deliver us from the power and penalty of sin and bring us back to God.

Colossians 1:21-22

Take the time to memorize the answer to question 24.

In today's question, what is a Redeemer?

(Think back to our previous catechism devotions—to “redeem” someone is to set them free from captivity through the payment of a price. A “redeemer” is one who sets a captive free through the payment of a price. Anyone remember what the price of freedom is called? A “ransom”).

In today's answer, what is the penalty of sin?

(Read Romans 6:23 to find the answer—only instead of the word “wages,” use the word “ransom payment.” It is significant that this verse occurs at the end of a long passage in which the apostle Paul repeatedly speaks of us as “slaves of sin” who have been set free to become “slaves of God.” But the “wages,” or “ransom payment” of our freedom was death).

Now read the following story, taken from the Gospels:

The King Who Died for One, and All

When Pilate left for the Governor's palace around daybreak, his wife was still fast asleep. He knew he would be busy all day keeping the people in line. It was the week of Passover, after all, and Jerusalem was filled with Jews from all over Judea and beyond.

The moment Pilate arrived at the palace, he was summoned by some of his guards. As he had feared, a crowd of Jews was already outside clamoring for him. He let them wait for a while to put them in their place and then went out to them.

There on the palace steps were his usual critics—the chief priests, elders, and teachers of Israel—angry and demanding. They had brought some poor man with them whom they had bound and beaten.

“We want you to try this man,” several of them announced as soon as Pilate appeared in the doorway. “He must be executed.”

“Is this Jesus who I've heard so much about?” Pilate asked, already wishing he hadn't come to the palace this morning. “What charges do you bring against him?”

“He's a criminal,” an elder responded vaguely. “We wouldn't be handing him over to you if he weren't guilty.”

His suspicions now thoroughly aroused, Pilate said, “Take him and try him according to your own law and leave me out of it.”

“He must be condemned under Roman law,” the elder insisted, “You will not allow us to execute for violations of OUR law, and so you must try him.”

“But what Roman law has been violated?” Pilate asked again.

“Well,... he has stirred up the whole nation,” the chief priest announced with a dramatic wave of his arm. “He claims to be a king, the Christ, and... and he opposes the payment of taxes to Caesar.” (This last charge was an outright lie.)

Tired of their wild accusations, Pilate turned his back on them and went inside his palace. He knew that the Jewish leaders were jealous of Jesus because of his wise teachings, miracles, and many followers.

“Bring Jesus to me,” he ordered the guards.

They returned with the bound Jesus a few moments later. Noting about him was threatening, or for that matter very “kingly,” thought Pilate. “Aren't you going to answer their charges?” he asked Jesus. “Are you the king of the Jews?”

“Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied. “But my kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

“You are a king then!” Pilate seized on this, still unsure how it was a crime.

“You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

“What odd words!” Pilate thought. “I have never heard anyone talk like this. Surely his claims are preposterous.” But he grew a bit nervous.

Just then a servant entered and handed Pilate a note marked “Urgent!” It was from his wife, and it said: “You will be asked to try an innocent man today. Have nothing to do with him, for I already have suffered greatly in a dream about him this morning.”

That was enough for Pilate. He would have Jesus beaten to please the people and then let him go. He went back out to the leaders, who had by now attracted a curious throng of festival-goers. “I have examined this man and find no basis for your charges against him,” said Pilate. “He has committed no crime deserving death, so I will release him after he has been beaten.”

The mob, which the Jewish leaders had been coaching, jeered angrily at this verdict. They screamed, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Afraid they would incite the whole town into a riot, Pilate cast about in his mind another plan. “Here’s what I will do for you,” he announced. “According to custom, I will free one Jewish prisoner in honor of your Passover. It will either be Jesus, or that convicted murderer Barabbas. The other will be crucified. Which would you have me free?” Surely they would rather have Jesus released to them than a known murderer, he thought.

“Barabbas,” they said in unison, and without hesitation.

Pilate shook his head and swallowed hard. “Very well, then, let this innocent man’s blood be on your heads, not mine! Guards, release Barabbas, and take Jesus to be crucified in his place.”

Taken from: Matthew 27:11-26; Luke 23:2; John 18:28-40

Now answer the following questions:

- Did Jesus submit to Pilate and the Jewish leaders voluntarily?
- In the story, what guilty captive was set free because of Jesus’ willingness to die?
- What kind of person did Jesus “traded places” with?
- What sort of penalty was he facing for his crime?

Now read Romans 5:6-8

- According to this passage, who are we like in the story we just read?
- In what sense did Jesus die in our place?
- Did he do it because we are good and righteous people?
- What does God show us by sending Christ to die for us?

Spend some time in prayer thanking Jesus for what he *willingly* did on our behalf.

Extra for adults and older children: Take a look at this passage from John Stott from the Commentary section of the New City Catechism app this week. Quite profound!

The concept of substitution may be said, then, to lie at the heart of both sin and salvation. For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives which belong to God alone; God accepts penalties which belong to man alone.

Please make use of the New City Catechism app or website Commentary, Video and Prayer as you see fit.