

HERMAN
HOEKSEMA

THE AMAZING CROSS

Second Edition



REFORMED
FREE PUBLISHING
ASSOCIATION
Jenison, Michigan

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The Amazing Cross published as book 1 in *When I Survey: A Lenten Anthology*

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Printed in the United States of America

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Scriptures cited are taken from the King James (Authorized) Version

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Cover design by Jeff Steenholdt

Interior design and typesetting by Katherine Lloyd, the DESK

ISBN 978-1-944555-29-0

ISBN Ebook 978-1-944555-30-6

LCCN 2018930298

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FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

The republication of these instructive and inspirational reflections on the suffering and death of our Savior Jesus Christ by the Reformed pastor-teacher and theologian Herman Hoeksema (1886–1965) may be warmly received by the Reformed-Christian community that is serious about the heart of the gospel of God’s sovereign and saving grace.

Through careful exposition and application of various biblical texts, Hoeksema unfolds the sovereign workings of the triune God through his Son and by his Spirit before and at the cross of Calvary—in judgment and in salvation. For that is how these sermons are divided—into two main sections, the first of which treats the suffering and death of Jesus Christ as God’s amazing judgment of the world, and the second of which treats it as the amazing obedience of God’s faithful Servant-Son.

Such meditations on the passion of our Lord have a long history in Reformed churches. It has been the custom of faithful Reformed pastors to lead their congregants in the preaching of the gospel, especially during the Lenten season, through careful reflection on the atoning suffering and sacrifice of Christ. This is a sound and significant practice, for Christ crucified is the heart of God’s good news for sinners.

THE AMAZING CROSS

May the reprinting of *The Amazing Cross* serve the good purpose of keeping this practice alive, as well as of feeding a new generation of believers with these Christ-centered messages from the past, for the spiritual benefit of God's church and for the glory of the great God of redeeming grace.

Charles J. Terpstra

January, 2018

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

In the church I serve as pastor I follow the custom during Lenten season of devoting at least one sermon a Sunday to special contemplation of the passion and death of our Lord. Usually I try to single out one specific aspect of this suffering each year and to make of this one aspect the main theme of every sermon preached that particular season. From two of such sets of Lenten sermons I prepared the radio lectures that are hereby presented to the public.

The first part of *The Amazing Cross* considers that passion as God's judgment of the world. The second part treats the suffering of our Savior from the viewpoint of its being the expression of voluntary obedience on his part, as the servant of the Lord.

May God use this publication for the edification of many.

Herman Hoeksema
Grand Rapids, Michigan
1943

PART ONE

AMAZING JUDGMENT



CHAPTER 1

THE JUDGMENT OF THE WORLD

Now is the judgment of this world.

—John 12:31

“**N**ow is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.” Our Lord spoke these words only a few days before his final suffering and death on the cross. In fact, he spoke them specifically with a view to his death. It was the first day of the final week of Jesus’ public ministry, the day he made his royal entry into Jerusalem in fulfillment of Zechariah’s well known prophecy: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee...riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass” (9:9).

During Jesus’ last days, more crowded with events than any other part of his ministry, all things clearly pointed to the Savior’s death. The day before, at the supper prepared for him in Bethany in the home of Lazarus, Mary had prophesied of his approaching end when she anointed Jesus’ feet with the precious spikenard she kept against the day of his burying (John 12:7). Spurred on in their evil designs by the apparent popularity of the Savior—which seemed to

have reached a new climax through the raising of Lazarus from the dead, and which revealed itself in the enthusiastic acclamations of the multitude that accompanied Jesus on his royal entry into the holy city—the chief priests consulted to kill not only Jesus but also Lazarus.

Certain Greeks had come to Jerusalem to worship at the feast of passover. They requested of Philip, “Sir, we would see Jesus” (v. 21). In that request the Lord evidently beheld a sign of the fulfillment of the promise that he would see his seed when his soul had been made an offering for sin (Isa. 53:10). For in connection with that incident the Lord said, “The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:23–24). Indeed, the Lord was that corn of wheat that had to fall into the ground and die before it could bring forth fruit. Being conscious of that and of the shadow of the cross creeping over his soul that moment, he cried out, “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name” (vv. 27–28). Oh, indeed, it was the hour, the hour in which God would be glorified through the death of his Son. With a view to that hour the Lord solemnly declared, “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out” (v. 31).

Strangely unreal and contrary to fact those words sounded from the lips of the Lord at that moment. “Now is the judgment of this world!” How could he speak thus? How could he speak thus at that time and with direct reference to that moment? Did not the day of the judgment of this world appear far off, farther in fact than ever before? Did not the prince of this world seem more firmly established on his throne than ever before? Was not the truth of the

matter the exact opposite from what Jesus so solemnly and confidently declared? Would not the whole world, presided over by its wicked prince, sit in judgment over the Son of man, and would they not have the complete and final victory over him? Or did our Savior not know what awaited him in that hour?

The leaders of the Jews already had taken counsel together how they could kill him. Another day or two and one of Jesus' disciples would covenant with the enemy for thirty pieces of silver to betray him. The night was not far off when the enemy would come against him with swords and staves and take him captive, and even his offended disciples would forsake him. He was to be brought before the Jewish council not as the judge but as the judged—accused, maltreated, blindfolded, buffeted, spit upon—as the helpless and powerless object of their furious hatred. He was to appear before the Roman governor, indicted as a malefactor, a common rebel who had incited the people to insurrection against Caesar. He was to be subjected to Herod's cruel and cowardly mockery and to the contempt and reproach of the Roman soldiers—the purple robe, the crown of thorns, the mock scepter—and to the shame of being rejected in favor of a common criminal. He was to be condemned to the shameful death of the cross, nailed to the accursed tree as a public spectacle, and exposed to the reproach of the whole world.

Did not the Lord know? Oh, but he did! He saw in all its horror the way that stretched before him. Yet, contrary to all external appearances, he solemnly declared, "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out!"

Thus it had to be. As men view the events of this world, what was historically the world's trial of Jesus was in reality God's trial of the world. What was to all appearances the condemnation of the Son of man by the tribunal of the world was in deepest reality the condemnation of the world before the tribunal of the Judge

of heaven and earth. Two thousand years ago, or more definitely speaking in “the hour” of Jesus, in that brief period when the Christ of God was tried, condemned, and crucified by the rulers of this world, the world very really stood in judgment before God and was tried and condemned.

True, there will come a final day, a day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God when all the implications in the judgment of the cross will be publicly verified and exposed. But that does not alter the fact that in a very real sense the judgment of the world has already become a fact through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must understand and believe this truth. The world is already and irrevocably condemned. The prince of this world has already been utterly cast out. In the midst of this condemned world with its deposed prince, we must take shelter by faith in the shadow of the cross and take hold of the justifying power of the resurrection, so that we may be saved.

In the first part of this book I will treat some of the chief episodes in that judgment of the world. In that judgment God appeared as judge, and the world was summoned before the bar of his justice as the defendant.

What is the world of which the Lord spoke? *World* does not always have the same meaning in scripture. You cannot quote the Bible at random on this point, as many do, and explain that *world* simply means all men. In the main, scripture speaks of two distinct and totally different worlds. The one is God’s world; the other is fallen man’s world. A glance at some of the passages where the word occurs will at once verify this statement.

On the one hand, we read in John 3:16 the well-known words: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” This refers to God’s world, the world of his everlasting

good pleasure, the world of his love, the world he purposes to save in Christ, the world that will be revealed in all its perfection of beauty in the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness will dwell and of which Christ is the prince and head forever. On the other hand, we read in 1 John 2:15–17: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” This refers to sinful man’s world, full of corruption and unrighteousness and motivated throughout by enmity against God, the world that is not the object of God’s love and may not be the object of our love.

On the one hand, we read: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Cor. 5:19). On the other hand, the Savior said, “I pray not for the world” (John 17:9). He also said, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (15:18–19). The one refers to God’s world; the other refers to man’s world.

On the one hand, the word of God declares, “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (3:17). On the other hand, the Savior solemnly declared, “Now is the judgment of this world” (12:31). The two worlds are temporarily one, as the wheat and the chaff are one; for all are by nature in Adam, and all are under sin and condemnation. But God saves his world out of man’s world in the way of justice and judgment.

When the Savior declared, “Now is the judgment of this world,” he spoke of the world of man, of fallen man. Of this world Satan is the prince, not because he has any rightful authority or power, nor because he ever succeeded in dethroning God, but because man—who was originally created king of the earthly creation in order to serve the earthly creation with all things and to serve his God with all things—rebelled against the Most High, allied himself with the devil, and ever since has performed the will of the devil and subjected all things to the service of sin and iniquity. It is the world as it exists always, in every age of history, and as we very clearly behold it in our day. It is the world with its power and might, its knowledge and wisdom, its commerce and industry, its science and art, and its culture and civilization, without God and in opposition to him; the world with its pride and self-exaltation, its trust in man and in the power and wisdom of man, its hatred of God and of one another, its covetousness and lust for power and love for the glory of man; the world with its lust of the flesh, its idolatry and adultery, its profanity and deceit, its striving after pleasures and treasures, its music and dancing, and its shows and vanities; the world, too, with its strife and debate, its unrest and revolutions, and its wars and destruction.

It also must be stated that it is the world with its righteousness of man, its self-righteousness and imaginary or self-asserted goodness, and its man-made religion and piety. For always that world, with all its iniquity and corruption, puts on a cloak of righteousness and goodness. With all its hatred it speaks of love; with all its injustice and shedding of blood it speaks of its own justice. That beautiful, mighty, powerful, glamorous, boasting, self-righteous, proud, and thoroughly corrupt world, that painted and adorned harlot, the Lord had in mind, when he said, “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.”

In the hour of judgment that evil world was well represented. That had to be so, for in that one moment of its history the entire world, the world of all ages—from the beginning of its history to the time of its culmination in the antichristian beast—was judged once and forever. When, therefore, the world was called before the bar of divine justice, it had to be represented by the very best it could possibly produce. The world that rejected and killed the Son of God could not be represented by a tribe of ignorant and savage cannibals or by a band of criminals, for whose acts of sacrilege and cruel murder it would not have to claim responsibility. On the contrary, the very best, the most just, the noblest and wisest had to be delegated to that court of justice where the world was to be judged and condemned. The cross of Christ could not be erected in some forsaken corner of the world in the wilds of Africa, but had to be exhibited in the very center of the world. The cross of Christ could not appear at any moment of history but had to be realized in the fullness of time. That center of the world in that fullness of time was Jerusalem in 33 AD. It was there and then that the whole world of all ages appeared in all its culture and civilization, in its wisdom and human philosophy, in its power and human justice, and in all the splendor of its natural light as it stood in the pride of rebellion against the living God: the world at its best.

There was more. Not only the world of culture and philosophy was represented in Jerusalem in 33 AD, but also the world of religion, the same rebellious and corrupt world as it was in the church, and as it came into contact, and had been in contact for many centuries, with the light of God's special revelation in the law and the prophets, with the word of God spoken at sundry times and in divers ways through the prophets and finally spoken through his Son.

Was there ever a moment in the history of the world more

favorable for the world to appear before the bar of highest justice? Was there ever a place more completely and centrally representing all the culture and religion of the world at its best than Jerusalem? There were the leaders of the Jews, the chief priests and elders, the scribes and Pharisees, the theologians of those days, the men who knew the law and scrupulously kept it. And there was the official court of the Roman Empire, famous for its knowledge of what was just and true among men and enlightened and adorned by the wisdom and refinement of Greek culture and civilization. There were Caiaphas and Annas, there were all the Sanhedrists, members of the highest Jewish tribunal; there was Herod the Tetrarch; and there was Pilate the Roman governor, the representative of Roman justice. There was Judas who had been in close contact with the Lord for three years. And there were the Jews, whose were the fathers, the covenants, the promises, and the law giving. All of them constituted "the world" of which the Lord spoke at that time and which was about to be judged and its prince about to be cast out. They represented the world of all times and in whatever form it may appear.

But, you say, in what sense was the hour of Jesus' suffering and condemnation by the world, his crucifixion and death, the judgment of the world?

Through the suffering of Jesus the world was put on trial. It was summoned before the bar of God's justice; it was publicly tried and exposed in its real character; it was found wanting and condemned. This is an essential element in all judgments: the defendant must be summoned and tried by the judge. It was no different with God's judgment of the world. The world had to be publicly tried, its guilt, its corruption, and its worthiness of eternal wrath and condemnation had to be clearly set forth. Not, indeed, as if God had to find out the real spiritual and ethical value of the world. He knows

that the world, the wicked world as it stands in alliance with the devil, in spite of all its culture and show of goodness and wisdom and justice and religion, is filled with pride and corruption, with enmity against God and is, therefore, worthy of damnation. But God had to be justified before the whole creation. Every mouth had to be stopped, and all had to acknowledge that he is just and righteous when he condemned the world. Therefore, the world had to be exposed. Its mask of culture and religion, its self-righteousness and show of goodness had to be torn away, and the world had to show itself in all its naked shame and corruption. For that purpose the world had to be tried.

That trial God instituted through his Son in the flesh, his holy child Jesus. All the world had to be placed before the questions: What think ye of the Christ? What will you do with him? For Christ is the revelation of God. The Father he clearly revealed. He came to witness the truth. The light he presented in a world of darkness. As Christ, in the hour of his trial, stood before the world as a weak and helpless man, without power and without defense, the world in principle faced the question, what will you do with God's representative, with the Son of God, with God himself, if he would stand before you in the form of a helpless man?

Oh, the Jewish rulers meant to avoid a public trial. They would rather not answer any questions at all. Their plan was that, as opportunity presented itself, the traitor would deliver Jesus to the rulers, and somehow they would do away with Jesus by subtlety. They would kill Jesus secretly, without publicity, not on the feast day, and without any formal trial or judicial procedure. But that could not be. Publicly the Lord had to be tried, because clearly and definitely the Jewish rulers had to answer the question—not their own but God's question—what will you do with the Son of God?

So their plans were frustrated. And in the most official way, in the most public place, and on the most public day of all, the feast of passover, all the world answered God's question in that hour of judgment. Several factors contributed to the frustration of their plans and to the realization of the purpose of God. There was the raising of Lazarus and the resulting growing popularity of Jesus that caused the wicked leaders of the Jews to become excited and to hasten their wicked schemes. There was, on the night of his betrayal, Jesus' dismissal of the traitor. Judas certainly had no plans to perform his dark deed that night, but Jesus forced Judas by suddenly exposing his hypocrisy and dismissing him from the upper room to do quickly what he had planned and had sold himself to do. Not in secret but in the way of a public trial by all the world, not in a forsaken corner of the world but in the most public place of all the world and of all times—on the feast of passover and in Jerusalem—the whole world was placed before the question, what will ye do with the Son of God? The whole world answered with one accord, "If we could get hold of God we would surely kill him! Away with him; crucify him!"

Upon that world, whose mask of culture and goodness had thus been torn off and who had become exposed in all its wicked enmity against the living God, God poured out the vials of his wrath. The sentence of God's just wrath was executed against the sin of the world.

In that hour of wrath and desolation, the same Christ, the Son of God in human flesh, proceeded to the place of execution to represent his own whom the Father had given to him, his own world of which he had been appointed the head from before the foundation of the world, the world of God's everlasting love. For his own people and his own world were in that old world of sin and death and corruption, were one with that world, one in guilt and condemnation,

and had to be redeemed from it. To redeem his own, the Lamb of God had to take away the sin of the world. To take away the sin of the world, he willingly and obediently had to make his way to the place of wrath and judgment in the hour of the condemnation of the world, and there in his own flesh bear all the suffering and agony of the wrath of God to the bitter end.

So Jesus went to the cross. Oh, indeed, he was nailed to the cross by wicked hands. That the world thus crucified the Son of God was the everlasting condemnation of the world. Yet Jesus made that cross his own, the altar upon which he brought the perfect sacrifice of himself. God transformed the cross of men into the place of the execution of his righteous wrath against the sin of the world and poured all the vials of his wrath over the head of his only begotten Son.

The world had been tried and exposed and condemned. The sentence was executed, but in the place of execution stood the Son of God. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.

While the old world has been judged and condemned and the prince of that world has been cast out, deprived of all his power to reign, the day will soon come when that condemnation of the old world and its prince will be finished and fully executed. The new world, the world of God's eternal love in Christ Jesus the Lord, will emerge from the terrible fire of judgment, for he proved himself to be the obedient servant of Jehovah even unto the bitter death of the cross. By his obedience Jesus fully satisfied for sin and obtained an eternal righteousness for that new world of which he is the eternal prince. From the hour of the judgment of the world of sin, he emerged, justified, in his resurrection from the dead. He ascended into heaven and was exalted at the right hand of God and endowed with power to destroy the old world and to establish the new world in eternal righteousness.

THE AMAZING CROSS

By the power of faith he gives to us, we turn away from the world that was judged and condemned. We are liberated from the bondage of its prince, in order even now to become servants of righteousness under the lordship of the Prince of Peace.

Blessed are all those who put their trust in him!