

HERMAN  
HOEKSEMA

# THE ROYAL SUFFERER

Second Edition



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# FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

The eight meditations that follow are the written version of Reformed Witness Hour radio sermons that Herman Hoeksema, longtime pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, MI, delivered during a Lenten season in the early 1940s.

In these meditations Hoeksema brings together two realities about Christ. First, he *suffered*, and his suffering was *lifelong*. Second, he suffered *as King!* Christ did not become king by his ascension, as a *result* of his suffering. Rather, he who is and was God's Anointed, the promised Messiah, the Son of David, was king from all eternity, and manifested his kingship during his life on earth. He suffered *because* he was King!

How to relate the truths of his suffering and his royalty gives us pause. Earthly kings do suffer, being men. But does not their suffering end in the loss of their glory and the termination of their kingship? How could Christ suffer as king, yet remain king? How could he be exalted to greater glory through suffering?

Other questions arise. That Christ's temptation by Satan, as well as his arrest, trial, and crucifixion, were aspects of his suffering, we understand. But how did these constitute *royal* suffering? How was his refusal to be the Jews' king (John 6) *suffering*? How was his trial before Herod *royal* suffering? How could his death be

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both royal defeat and royal victory? And how was his resurrection royal victory?

Masterfully, exegetically, and devotionally, Hoeksema's meditations answer these questions. In answering them, the chapters that follow do not merely provide information for the head, but sustenance for the heart and food for the soul. Reading them, let us bow before our glorious King in adoration and worship!

Prof. Douglas Kuiper

January, 2019

# PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The theme of the following chapters is expressed in the words of our Lord to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus: “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26). Exactly as the Christ he had to suffer. A Christ without the cross is a contradiction in terms.

He was not merely a king who suffered, but also the one who had to suffer because he was king and to obtain his kingdom. For him there was no crown without the cross, no glory except in the way of shame, and no life except through the resurrection.

Thus there is no Christ except as the crucified one, and there is no salvation except in him who died in order that he could attain to the resurrection.

Herman Hoeksema  
Grand Rapids, Michigan  
1945



## CHAPTER 1

# THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

*Get thee behind me, Satan.*

—Luke 4:8

In the revelation of Jesus Christ his suffering occupies an essential place. Eliminate the cross as an indispensable and strictly necessary element from that revelation, and there is no Christ left. For him there was no crown without the cross, no glory without shame, and no life except through the resurrection and, therefore, through death. After his resurrection he expressed to the sojourners to Emmaus this necessity of his suffering: “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26). His whole earthly sojourn was characterized by suffering. His suffering was not incidental or something to be avoided, but it belonged to the work the Father had given him to do.

Therefore, Jesus had to deliberately choose suffering, prefer it, and accomplish it to the end; for he came into the world as the servant of the Lord at the head of a sinful people to fulfill all righteousness, the righteousness of God with respect to sin. Thus in the way of righteousness he redeemed those whom the Father had given to him. That meant that he had to satisfy the justice of God, to bear the wrath of God and the punishment of sin in the perfect

obedience of love. So, in all his work he suffered, and in his suffering he worked.

As God's prophet in the world, he suffered, enduring shame and contradiction for God's name's sake. As the lamb of God and the high priest of his people, Christ brought the perfect sacrifice, pouring out his soul unto death. As the divinely anointed king, he had to battle his way into his kingdom and overcome the powers of the devil, sin, and death not by might or by the power of the sword, but by voluntarily choosing and traveling the way of the cross. He is the royal sufferer in an altogether unique sense.

I will consider some of the scriptural passages in which he appears in this capacity as the king who rejects all the glory of the world, deliberately chooses the way of suffering and death, and so lays the foundations of his kingdom in his own blood.

The first passage is Luke 4:5–8:

5. And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.
6. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give it.
7. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine.
8. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

We are acquainted with the occasion of that first encounter between God's anointed King and the prince of this world. Jesus was about to begin his public ministry. Already he had been baptized and received the testimony from heaven that he was God's

beloved Son. The Spirit that had descended on him at his baptism led him at once into the wilderness to begin the battle with the enemy that had to be overcome, a battle that would be brought to its victorious consummation only through the cross and in the resurrection of the Servant of the Lord.

We are reminded at once of a similar encounter that had taken place centuries before in the first paradise. But there are important differences between that first temptation and Jesus' encounter with Satan. The former temptation took place in paradise; the scene of the latter temptation was the desert. In the former temptation man was in possession of the dominion of the world over which his God had appointed him king; in the latter temptation the devil appeared as prince of the world in possession of all its kingdoms, while Christ, who is God's anointed king, had not even a place to lay his head. In the former temptation the devil took the initiative and invaded paradise to bring man to his fall; in the latter temptation the Son of man sought out the prince of the world in his own abode, the desert, to test his strength and commence the battle. In the former temptation the God-appointed king of creation suffered defeat through disobedience; in the latter temptation the Son of man scored a decisive victory. For the rest, we may pass in silence several questions that might arise in connection with that temptation of the Lord in order to concentrate on its central significance: the initial and decisive victory of Jesus the royal sufferer over the prince of this world.

The opposing parties in that mortal conflict were the Christ of God, the anointed king over Zion, the servant of the Lord, whom God had ordained from before the foundation of the world to be the head over all things; and the devil, or Satan, the adversary of God and of his cause in the world, the prince and ruler of this world, who appeared especially in that capacity, as was evident from his vaunted boast.

To understand Satan's position over against the Lord as Satan offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, we must remember that God had created this world as a kingdom, with the man Adam as its king. Adam's position before the fall was that of friend-servant of God, and as such he was king of the earthly creation, and dominion was given him over all things. All creatures were to serve him, in order that he might serve his God. But Satan launched his attack on that king-servant of God and tempted him to become unfaithful to his Lord and Creator, to violate God's covenant, and to submit himself to the devil's lordship. Satan succeeded in the temptation. Man became disobedient, rejected the word of God, and made an alliance with Satan. Henceforth Adam still stood at the head of the earthly creation, but in enmity against God and in friendship with the prince of darkness, to subject all things to him in the service of iniquity. In this ethical sense the devil is the prince and ruler of this world. Through man he has dominion over the kingdoms of this world. He is the world's prince not because he has any right to rule, nor because he can ever wrest the reins of government from the hands of almighty God, but because he reigns in the sphere of iniquity, and in that sphere fallen man serves him.

However, from before the foundation of the world God in his eternal good pleasure had anointed his own King over all things. And through the power of this King, his only begotten Son in the flesh, he purposed to destroy the works of the devil, reveal the glory of his own name, and redeem and deliver all things in heaven and in earth, to reconcile them unto himself, and to raise them to the highest level of the eternal kingdom of heaven. In spite of himself the devil had to serve this purpose, nor could he ever serve any other purpose with all his wicked devices against the living God.

What is more, immediately after the fall God openly announced that purpose and declared the decree to the devil himself in the well-known words of Genesis 3:15: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” It was the announcement of the devil’s utter defeat through the promised Seed. And the devil understood.

Thus all through the centuries of the old dispensation, the devil has made a desperate attempt to destroy the seed of the woman before the final Seed could be born. The devil tried to destroy that seed in the very beginning through Cain’s murder of Abel, but God raised up another seed in Seth. This design of the devil can be seen in the persecution and temptation of the prediluvian church. When only eight souls were left, God saved his church through the flood. Throughout the history after the flood, we can clearly see the design of the devil to destroy the holy seed and prevent the coming of the promised Seed that would crush his head: the attempt to build the tower of Babel, the murderous design of Pharaoh on the little children of Israel in Egypt, the continuous fury of the nations against Israel and the house of David that culminated in the Babylonian captivity, the plot of wicked Haman to destroy all the Jews and obliterate them from the earth, and the cruel persecutions instigated by Antiochus Epiphanes, the old dispensational anti-christ. That is the reason the heathen always raged, and the people imagined a vain thing, the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers took counsel together against the Lord and his Anointed. But he who sits in the heaven laughed and had them in derision and spoke to them in his sore displeasure: “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion” (Ps. 2:1–6).

God’s counsel was realized. Although it looked very dark indeed for the seed of David in the fullness of time, God fulfilled his promise. The great Seed of the woman was born. One last attempt was

made to kill him while he was still an infant. Herod murdered the little children of Bethlehem, but that attempt was frustrated too.

Then they stood together face to face on a high mountain, those two—the prince of the world of man and the anointed King of Zion, who had come to crush the other's head, to destroy the kingdom of darkness, and to establish his own kingdom, the kingdom of heaven on the foundations of divine justice and righteousness.

But how would they fight? What manner of war would they wage? Would the issue as to who would be ruler of the world be decided by brute strength, by main force, by the power of arms? No, that was impossible, for the question was not one of might. If it had been, the devil would surely have been crushed, destroyed by the word that proceeded out of the mouth of the King of Zion, for he is the mighty Son of God, coequal with the Father and the Holy Ghost.

The Son of God had assumed human nature, and there, on the mountain of temptation, he appeared as the obedient servant of Jehovah. He had to receive his kingdom from the Father, and only in the way of obedience could he enter into the glory of his kingdom. He had to suffer for his own. He stood at the head of a sinful people who had to be redeemed, in order that through and with him they could inherit the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, he had to suffer and be obedient even unto the death of the cross. Deliberately he had to choose and travel to the end of the way of the cross. For the question was one of righteousness, of the righteousness of God.

Hence the battle that was fought on that high mountain, and that was finished finally on the cross, was a spiritual warfare that had to be waged with spiritual means and with spiritual ends in view. If the devil could persuade the Servant of the Lord to forsake the way of obedience and suffering, Satan would overcome the Servant of the Lord and again more have the victory.

Thus Satan attacked. He offered the Son of man a proposition. Satan wanted to make a covenant, an alliance with the Son of man. Satan's proposal was as shameful as it was bold. To make his proposition as concrete, real, and attractive as possible, Satan had taken Jesus to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. How such a panoramic view of all the kingdoms of the world could be obtained even from a high mountain, is a question that does not need to be answered now. Suffice it to say that in a sense those kingdoms were actually Satan's. It was more than a mere boast when the devil claimed that those kingdoms and their power and glory had been delivered unto him, and he could give them to whomever he desired. His world, the world of sin and rebellion against God, Satan showed unto the Savior.

In that world Satan's will, the will of the flesh, was being done. He was its spiritual lord. And that world had its power and glory. Man, even in his sin, ruled over it, belabored it, cultivated it, brought to light its hidden treasures, and subdued it. The devil offered to Zion's King the world of culture and civilization, of man's power and glory, of pleasures and treasures, of man's art and science, man's industry and commerce, and man's wisdom and ingenuity. But that same world with all its power and glory was subjected to and pressed into the service of sin, the world as it stood in enmity against God, the world full of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. That world the devil offered to the Servant of the Lord. He could have it and become its lord for nothing.

Why then should there be enmity between Jesus and the devil? Why should Christ travel the deep way of the cross, since the devil was ready to surrender his throne to Jesus without a struggle?

However, there was an important condition to the devil's proposition: "If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine" (Luke 4:7).

Always the devil's offers are conditional, and always the condition is the same: forsake God and acknowledge Satan as lord. Therefore, it is always either Satan or God. You cannot serve God and mammon; you must hate one and love the other.

Christ was also placed before this alternative. How could it be different? The devil was king of the world in only the moral, ethical sense, in the sphere of iniquity. To be sure, he *would* not, but neither *could* he offer anything to Christ *as the servant of the Lord*. Only if Christ would become *Satan's* servant. If Satan could persuade the Christ to become the antichrist, Satan could make good his promise and surrender to Jesus the kingdoms of this world. Such was the audacity and shamelessness of the devil's proposition.

You say, perhaps, that the temptation was not real and that the Lord could never have been attracted by such a proposition. To this I would answer as follows. First, if you mean that there was not the slightest possibility that the Lord would yield and fall for the temptation, you are right. Christ could not sin and that not because he was without sin, but because he was the Son of God in human nature. From this viewpoint the temptation could only serve the purpose to manifest his faithfulness and to reveal the devil's defeat.

Second, if you mean that apart from its ethical implication the proposition did not appeal at all to Jesus' human nature, so that there was not even an element of trial, I must differ. Besides, how can we possibly have the right thus to minimize the reality of Jesus' temptation and suffering? How often are we tempted by just a very small part of that world that was offered to Jesus, to become unfaithful and to serve the devil? This the Lord could never do. However, do not forget that he very really dreaded his way of suffering and that his human nature was always attracted to another way than the cross. The temptation was real insofar as it placed before the Lord the alternatives of human glory and the way of the cross.

“Get thee behind me, Satan!” Christ’s rejection of the devil’s proposition was both indignant and final. There was no room for discussion, “for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (v. 8). This principle was written not only in the scriptures, but also in the heart of the Servant of the Lord. His meat was to do the Father’s will. Father’s will would lead Jesus to the cross and through the depth of hell. Hence all the glory of the world he would gladly reject in order to choose the way of obedience unto death. The Royal Sufferer he would be, trusting that the Father would give him the kingdom.

In trust and obedience Jesus was not put to shame. For he was raised from the dead, exalted to the highest glory, and he will appear again as the king of kings and the lord of lords unto salvation, so that all those who love his appearing may share in his glory!