

THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST ON THE CROSS

Rev. H. Hofman sr. - Lord's Day 15, Question 39

Psalter 362

Scripture: Galatians 3

Psalter 243:10-15

Psalter 47:1-5

Psalter 280:1, 2

Dear congregation, we ask your attention for Lord's Day 15 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 39:

Question 39: Is there anything more in His being crucified, than if He had died some other death?

Answer: Yes [there is]; for thereby I am assured, that He took on Him the curse which lay upon me; for the death of the cross was accursed of God.

We wish to consider:

The Death of Jesus Christ on the Cross

1. The Death on the Cross was Accursed of God
2. The Death on the Cross was the Most Disgraceful Death
3. The Death on the Cross was an Atoning Death

I repeat: The Death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross: First, The Death on the Cross was Accursed of God; secondly, The Death on the Cross was the Most Disgraceful Death; and thirdly, The Death on the Cross was an Atoning Death.

Congregation, if you read this question, "Is there anything more in His being crucified, than if He had died some other death?" the answer is, "Yes [there is]; for thereby I am assured, that He took on Him the curse which lay upon me; for the death of the cross was accursed of God." It tells us something about our life. It tells us that the curse of God rests upon us. Since the fall in Paradise, we are under the wrath of God, and because we have transgressed God's holy law, we

are under the curse of the law. If we think about it and know it by experience, then it is a burden. We have heard it so many times. We have been brought up under the doctrines of God's Holy Word--the sin of Adam in Paradise, the fall in Paradise, the broken covenant of works. We are instructed all our life that we are transgressors of God's law and that we are dead in trespasses and sin. The consequence of this is that the curse of God rests upon us. "Thereby"--by the death of Christ on the cross--"I am assured, that He took on Him the curse which lay upon me." It must become a personal case--that I am assured.

What will the instructor teach us? You know that the instructor follows the apostolic confession in which the fact that Jesus died the death of the cross receives special mention: "He was crucified." That is a special death. The question is, "Is there anything more in His being crucified, than if He had died some other death?" We so often speak, also in doctrines, that Jesus Christ died for sinners, but here our attention is drawn to this special death, the death of the cross. "Is there anything more in His being crucified, than if He had died some other death?" The apostolic confession makes special mention of it: "He was crucified." That means that He was a cursed One, that the curse of the law was upon Him.

Then we must search the Scriptures as to what it means to be crucified, to die on the cross. The scriptural reference here is Deut. 21:22,23, "And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance." And Galatians 3:13 says, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Thus it is mentioned that a person who was hanged on a tree was accursed of God. A person had already died before he was hanged on a tree. Especially that He was hanged on the cross was the curse for the Lord Jesus Christ. The reference is not in the first place to capital punishment by hanging, but to the hanging and public exposure of the bodies of those that had been put to death by the sword or by stoning. That was the most common thing among the people of Israel; a person first was stoned to death and then he was exposed to the public, and that was the curse which rested upon him.

Such a public hanging, such a public exposure, was considered as an intensification of capital punishment. It was therefore the hanging itself and not the death by hanging that was an abomination and that caused the hanged one to be accursed of God. We can read what happened with the Lord of glory, with the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became Son of man, the blameless Lamb, the precious Mediator, in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, as well as in Paul's writings. His heart was filled with love for His entire church, for His black bride, being under the curse of the law. The Jews said to Pilate, "We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God."

According to the law of Moses, stoning was the punishment for blasphemy, and the high priest rent his clothes, and said, "You have heard His blasphemy." He, who had instructed the multitude in the way of salvation, who had never said one wrong word, was accused to be a liar and of blaspheming God. We read in Lev. 24:16, "And he that blasphemeth the Name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the Name of the Lord, shall be put to death." Thus Jesus was accused of blaspheming. We read in Matt. 26:65, "Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy. What think ye? And they answered and said, He is guilty of death."

Oh congregation, there are no words to explain the depth of the love of Christ and of His mediatorial work. He, who was without original and actual sin, who had never committed sin, was accused of blasphemy, of speaking lies when He said that He was the Son of God. For a long time, He was quiet and answered the high priest not one word. But when He spoke the truth, He was accused of being a liar. He was accused of blaspheming God, and in one accord they said, "He is guilty of death."

This punishment could be further intensified by hanging the body of the person stoned to death upon a tree or pole as a special indignity. The punishment for sedition among the Romans was different. There it was crucifixion. But with the Jews such a blasphemer must be brought to death by stoning him. Of all the modes of death and bodily punishment, crucifixion was the most bitter. It was the most painful and agonizing death, because the one crucified was slowly consumed by terrible pains in his limbs and vital organs. We can read in Psalm 22:14, what happened with the Lord Jesus Christ: "I am poured

out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels." It was a most disgraceful death. Only slaves, seditious persons, robbers, and others, such as the two who were crucified with Christ, were crucified. Here we are standing at the depth of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, as Isaiah 53:3 says, "He is despised and rejected of men ... we esteemed Him not." He was numbered with the transgressors.

The death of the cross was accursed of God. A special curse lay upon it, since this mode of execution represented the extreme penalty for an offence punishable by death. We see that all things had to happen as they took place. There were the sins of the high priest, the sins of the Pharisees and the scribes. There were also the sins of the Jews. There was the sin of Pilate and all the multitude who had accused Him of blasphemy. But, above all the sins of all these people, there is the counsel of God. It is God's way of salvation. It is God's way to open the closed door. It is God's way to remove the curse that lay upon us, to transfer it to the strong shoulders of this precious Mediator.

Above all that took place at Jerusalem and on Calvary, there is the Holy Scripture, there is the will of God. In this sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Scripture was fulfilled. We read in Numbers 21:6-9, that the brazen serpent was erected upon a pole, and that all who looked upon it by faith might be healed. It was made in the form of the fiery serpent by which the children of Israel had been bitten. Christ Himself declared that the brazen serpent was a type of Himself. It was shown to all the Israelites; all those who had the poison of the serpent in their veins had to die, except those who looked up to that brazen serpent, as Jesus himself said, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." Christ told His disciples in Matt. 20:18, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify Him." It was not according to the counsel and law of God that Christ should suffer some other death in consequence--in illness, or infirmities of age. No, here was the requirement of God's holy justice. Here were the requirements of God's holy law. He gave His only-begotten Son into the hands of murderers, and Christ, the precious, blameless Lamb of God, gave Himself over to death, yes, the death of the cross. There could be no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood. Christ must

die a violent death, as it says in Heb. 9:22, "and without shedding of blood is no remission." In accordance with the counsel and will of God, Jesus was to die upon the cross. Yet the men who were responsible for His crucifixion carried the guilt of their own sins.

Oh congregation, that we may see and behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. That we may behold this precious Lamb of God by faith, which takes away the curse of the law, the curse of God which rests upon us. What does it mean? Do we have any impressions in our heart as to what the curse of the law is? We so often talk about our transgressions. So often we can hear that we have transgressed all God's commandments. But do we really know, do we really feel, what the consequences are, what the fruits are, of transgressing the law? Have we ever felt the curse of God's holy law? It means that we are cast away. How can we talk about our transgressions without tears in our heart and in our eyes? How can we talk about being a transgressor of God's holy law without impressions of our nothingness and that we are worthy to be cast away forever out of the presence of God?

What is God's curse? The instructor speaks about it: "For thereby I am assured, that He took on Him the curse which lay upon me." Are we able to explain it by experience? We can talk about it, and it is good to do so, to be instructed in dogmatics, but it is so different if we know these things by experience, when we feel the hand of God upon us. What is God's curse? God's curse is the expression of His holy wrath against sin and the sinner, against the workers of iniquity, against the transgressors of His holy law. It is the expression of His holy wrath against us. Then there cannot be communion with God, because there is a mountain of sin and guilt between us and our Creator. Maybe we can explain it as saying it is the opposite of His blessing. Both blessing and cursing are words of God. Blessing is the word of His favor, of His grace, of His lovingkindness, His drawing us into His fellowship and causing us to taste that the Lord is good. But the curse is the opposite. Curse is the word of His wrath and hot anger, expelling us from His house and His communion. It is God's wrath, causing us to experience Him as a consuming fire. Who can then live? To experience that there is such a distance between God and our soul, that He is a consuming fire, means that the wrath of God and the curse of God's law rests upon us. Then God is, according to our imagination, a consuming fire, and we cannot approach unto God. Then that consuming fire is casting us away from

Him, forsaking us, leaving us in utter terror of darkness and desolation, making us unspeakably wretched. Oh, those are moments that death is at hand, that hell is opened for us, and you will never forget it. If that happens in our life, if we experience that the curse of the law and the wrath of God rests upon us, then all our prayers, all our best works, all our promises, all our good works, all our so-called righteousnesses, are not able to remove the curse of the law. Nothing, nothing is able to remove the curse of the law from us. Then we are bound to death. Then only hell is open for us. Oh, the instructor has felt something of it: "That He took on Him the curse which lay upon me." Then God is a consuming fire, and I must go lost forever and ever. Then I have nothing to say anymore, and God is righteous in all His works.

Oh congregation, do you know something of the curse of the law which rests upon us, and that nothing can be done from our side to remove that curse of the law? And now that wonder, that unspeakable miracle, the wonder of God's grace and mercy, that Christ died on the cross as a cursed One. Here we see, with these few words of the apostolic confession, that "He was crucified." What a precious Person! He hung on the cross, cast out and cast away. The victim of crucifixion was a castaway. This curse of God was upon Christ as He was made sin for His people, and He experienced this awful curse through the cross. He acted there as a Mediator. He took upon Himself voluntarily the curse of all His people, His black bride. All the transgressions of His people were laid upon Him, and that of *all* his people. This curse of God was upon Christ as He was made sin for us.

There was no room for Him in all God's wide creation. Suspended between heaven and earth, there was no place for Him on earth among men, and no room for Him in heaven with God. He experienced that God was a consuming fire. He experienced in body and soul to be cast away from God. Man did not want Him. It was a burden for Him that man cast Him out of the holy city, and that they accused Him that He blasphemed God. But, congregation, God did not receive Him. He had no Name left unto Himself. Thus Christ emptied Himself completely. Here we see God's grace. He bore the curse that was upon Him. What a wonder of grace and mercy! He had no sin. We see His love. The death of the cross is of great meaning for the church of Christ. He is the Mediator. He is the Redeemer. Here we see the Substitute. He heard the accusations when He spoke the truth. He was accused, "He is guilty of death," but now, there are a people who must put their hand in their own bosom. God's children know something of it. They

feel and agree as they read in God's Word, and must say, "Amen. I am guilty of death. I have transgressed all God's commandments." In Deut. 27 we read that when Israel was about to go into Canaan, Moses brought all the people together to two mountains, mounts Gerizim and Ebal. From mount Gerizim, Moses was to read all the blessings of God, but on mount Ebal he was to read all the curses, and the people had to answer with a solemn "Amen." When you come home, read Deut. 27. Many times it says, "Cursed be he" who did this and that, "And all the people shall say, Amen."

Congregation, do we know something of the curses of mount Ebal? Have you ever ascended that mount? Have you ever heard it out of the Word of God, "Cursed is he that committeth this or that sin," and that you have agreed and have said, "Amen. Oh Lord, I am guilty of death. I have done that which is evil in Thy sight. I must die. Thou art a righteous God. Thou art righteous if Thou would cast me away forever and ever"? Do you know that solemn "Amen" with God's holy law, as being a cursed one, a transgressor of His commandments? Then we may say that Jesus Christ, as the great Substitute, ascended that mountain Golgotha, was crucified and exposed before God and man as a cursed Man, took upon Himself the curse of all His people, was exposed as a blasphemer and was numbered with the transgressors. The word of God came to Him, "Cursed is he," and He said, "Amen. It is Me." He was made sin, so that all the sins of His people were laid upon Him. That is the deep meaning of His being crucified. He did not die another death, but died on the cross, was exposed before God and man as a cursed One, because His entire flock, His black bride, was cursed, laying in the midst of death.

He did it as a Substitute. "For thereby I am assured, that He took on Him the curse which lay upon me." Let us first sing from Psalter 47, stanzas 1 through 5.

Through the death on the cross, He poured out His own blood. He sacrificed Himself and carried the blood of atonement into the sanctuary of God. It was a sacrifice, a death of atonement. His body was opened by the enemies when He was nailed to the cross, but He gave His life. He had power to come down from the cross, but He poured out His life. "He took on Him the curse which lay upon me." His death was an action. Every bitter drop of death, in all its misery, He must taste, and He drank this cup of God's wrath and the curse of the law to the end. "He took the curse which lays upon me," the believer says. That

means that God is so righteous that He took the curse which lays upon me, so that my shoulders are freed from the curse of the law. Then the consuming fire of God's wrath and anger, so to speak, is quenched, and we may enter into the realm of grace. Then we may feel, not the heat of His fiery anger, but the warmth of His great love.

Can we understand the depth of the Word of God, of what Paul wrote to the Galatians: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law"? He has taken away the curse of the law. Oh, what a wonder. Does He not become precious, if we see Him hanging on the cross, exposed before God and man? There were many Jews, Pharisees, scribes, and religious people at Golgotha who hated Christ, who despised Him, especially when he was hanging on the cross. But there were also people of God--they are also in our midst--who love this crucified Christ. Then it becomes such a wonder that He is exposed as a cursed One, especially for those who feel the curse of the law and the heat of God's wrath and anger. Oh, if we behold this cursed One, this crucified Mediator, then our heart breaks, and we receive faith to come as a cursed one, to bow our knees at the foot of the cross, and to bow our knees in the sand of Golgotha's hill. Then we must say, "Oh precious, dear Jesus, my Jesus, I see that all the curse of the law was transferred onto Thy shoulders; Thou art able to do it, and we may hear out of Thy dying mouth, 'It is finished.'" Oh, that finished work of Christ--"He has delivered me from the curse of the law." This Redeemer is Christ Jesus. He was appointed and called by His Father to do this work, and to it He Himself agreed. He came and has obtained eternal redemption for which He was abundantly qualified. He is that great Mediator. The blessings are obtained by Him only.

And now to say with the apostolic confession, "I believe that He was crucified." Do you believe it? I do not ask, "Do you know it?", or "Do you confess it?"--we all confess it--but do we believe it? In times when faith is small and weak, then we start to work ourselves. We try to reform our lives by doing so many good things. And what is the purpose of this?--to remove the curse of the law by our efforts. But I hope, if that is your case, that you come to the end of the law. And the end of the law is, "Cursed is everyone that does not keep the law." That is the end from our side, but there is also that great end of God, far above our power, that Christ has removed the curse of the law by His active and passive obedience, and went voluntarily to the death of the cross.

Congregation, for a cursed one, He is so precious. For a cursed soul, He becomes everything. Have you ever climbed on that hill Golgotha? Have you ever seen this precious Mediator? Without Christ there is no salvation. Without the crucified Christ there is no removal of the curse of the law. Without Christ's death on the cross, God remains for us a consuming fire.

The death on the cross now becomes the center of the preaching of the gospel. That is why God sends His servants to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified. That is why He sends His servants with the banner of the Holy Scripture, with a crucified Christ in the center of the banner, proclaiming that the Lamb of God taketh away the sins of the world. Woe unto all those who are against the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. We read in 1 Cor. 1:18: "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness." They dare to call the preaching of the crucified Christ foolishness. This precious Mediator is despised by whom?--by those that perish. Oh, think about it. "But unto us which are saved it is the power of God." There is a people in the world who like to hear nothing else but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, especially those who are under the curse of the law, who have come to the end of their possibilities, who have come to the end of their own worthiness, and who have seen an open hell. Oh, to hear something of Him who is crucified, that is everything they need. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness."

"For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." That is the contents of the message which we have to bring to you Sunday after Sunday, on house visitation, at the school chapel, in visiting the elderly, and so on. It is always the same message: "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." "God forbid," Paul says in Gal. 6, "that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." And in Colossians 1:20, Paul wrote, "And, having made peace through the blood of the cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself."

Dear congregation, I wish and pray with my whole heart that all of you are full of desire to hear more of the crucified Christ who died on the cross. We all by nature are under the wrath of God, under the curse of the law. Oh, do you hear it, young friends, boys and girls, children, fathers and mothers? We are under the curse of the law. And there is only one possibility that the curse of the law be

removed, and that is by Jesus Christ, the Man hanging on the cross. I would say with all my heart, "Come along, come along, to ascend the hill Golgotha to see that crucified Christ, to see His atoning blood dripping onto the earth, to experience peace in our heart, that He was cursed as a Substitute, and that He has delivered us." Then there is peace with God. Then we can live and die in comfort. Then hell is closed and heaven is opened.

Amen.

Psalter 280:1, 2