

THE REIGNING CHRIST

SUBSTANCE OF A SERMON

By

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Scripture Lesson: Revelation v., 1-14.

"For He must reign, till He hath put all His enemies under His feet."—8 Corinthians xv., 25.

OUR theme is that of the reigning Christ. The assumption of Paul, when he wrote these words, was that Christ was reigning. As he wrote, the world was under the iron heel of Rome; but he saw above and higher than the throne of Cæsar another Throne; and above Cæsar himself, another King, one Jesus.

Paul's vision was not that of Christ removed from activity, and passively waiting for some crisis in the economy of God. His vision of Christ was of Him actively reigning, and so reigning as to bring in a crisis, and bring in a consummation. Immediately preceding the words of my text, he wrote,

"Then cometh the end, when He shall deliver up the Kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power."

This vision of Christ as reigning, in the case of Paul, was the result of his discovery on the Damascene road of the fact that Jesus was risen and alive. Until that day of matchless wonder in his life, the Cross of Jesus had been in the thinking of Paul, the fitting, appropriate, and poetic ending to the career of an impostor. But when that day he found that the Crucified was actually alive, that He could appear to him, and speak to him in his own language there on that highway, call him by his own

name, and make Himself known by the old familiar name, Jesus, then all Paul's mental structures came crashing down around him; and he had to reconstruct everything in the light of that stupendous fact. He took time to do it. He went to Damascus for a few days, and then to Arabia, and was there, under the majestic shadow of Mount Sinai for two and probably three years, thinking the thing through.

The result to Paul was that from that moment the whole universe was new. The same conditions obtained everywhere, but he saw everything in a new perspective. The secret of perspective is the central point of vision; and for Paul from that day, the centre of vision was the risen Jesus, exalted by God to the place of supreme authority and power. This is discovered in all his preaching, in all his teaching, in all his serving, in all his suffering, in all his triumphing, in all his rejoicing, in all his letters. Paul for evermore had his vision fixed there; and all the lines of perspective resulted from that.

This is of vital importance to all those of us who are committed to Christ in life and service. It is a great thing to realize that He is alive. It is great, it is wonderful, it is everything; and yet it is equally important that we should understand that the living Christ is not inactive, that He is reigning. I do sometimes think that some of the best Christian people I know to-day, are missing this vision. There are many who seem to think that when He left, He went to wait; and by and by will come and reign. I pray you, make no mistake. He is reigning now.

Now I am not going to attempt to prove the fact, but to consider it; and I ask you to follow me then, as we discuss first of all, the enthroned Christ; secondly, the process of His reign; and finally, in a brief word, the consummation of His reign.

Now, when we thus speak of Christ as being the enthroned Christ, and the reigning Christ, we ask first of all, when did His enthronement take place? We are always more or less in difficulty when we ask a question like that, because when we speak in that way, it necessarily introduces the time element. Of course we are bound to do it, but let us realize the difficulty. In God, the eternal is supreme. The temporal, after all, is only human, and a thing of visibility. To take perhaps the supreme illustration, and thus to dismiss any further remarks along these lines. When was Jesus crucified? You and I at once have to revert to the calendar and to the almanack, and to dates. We are bound to do it. If you wrote a letter yesterday, you put at the head of your letter 1928. What do you mean? You are going back in history; quite right, perfectly right; but do not forget the Lamb was "slain from the foundation of the world."

There is the eternal, as well as the temporal; and if we just remind ourselves of this, we may then go to our historic method, all the while remembering that there are heights and depths and lengths and breadths vaster than time, which will baffle all our interpretations.

I go back then to my question. When was He enthroned? Upon one occasion, talking to His enemies, His critics, He challenged them to interpret a Psalm. He asked how it was that David called his Son his Lord? I go back to the Psalm, arrested by the fact that our Lord quoted it, and applied it to Himself; and I read its opening verses :

“ Jehovah saith unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand,
 Until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.
 Jehovah will send forth the rod of Thy strength out of
 Zion;
 Rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies.”

Observe the relationship between the text and that;

“ He must reign, till He hath put all His enemies under His feet.”

“ Jehovah saith unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand,
 Until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.”

Now I turn to the letter to the Hebrews, and I read :

“ When He had made purification of sins, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” (i., 3.)

Once more, to revert to the Psalm :

“ Jehovah saith unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand.”

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews says that He did this, when He had made purification of sins.

I turn over to the Ephesian letter, and I read :

“ He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come.” (i., 20, 21.)

I go to the Hebrew letter once more, and I read :

“ He, when He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; henceforth expecting till His enemies be made the footstool of His feet.” (x., 12, 13.)

And again :

“ Jesus, the Author and Perfector of faith, Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the Throne of God.” (xii., 2.)

And yet once more, I go to Peter, and I read :

“ Who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him.” (I, iii., 22.)

Carefully mark that wonderful harmony of revelation. The old prophetic Psalm said :

“ Jehovah saith unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand.” When did He do it? “ When He had made purification of sins ”; when He had “ endured the Cross,” “ despising ” the “ shame ”; when God “ raised Him,” and exalted Him. Then let us at once say that the reign of Jesus began when He ascended to the Father, when He took His place at the heart of the universal economy, “ at the right hand of God.” That is when He began His reign. Ascension Day was the day of His Coronation in high heaven.

Why was He thus set at the right hand of God? Paul says here, “ He must,” “ He must reign.” Why the “ must ”? One answer will be enough—though I am proposing to give a second—and that answer would be that it was by God’s appointment. When Paul, who wrote this letter, was preaching on Mar’s Hill, he told that listening crowd of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, those dilettante foolers, that God had

“ Appointed a day in which He will govern the world in righteousness by the Man Whom He hath ordained.”

God appointed Him to reign. Why did God appoint Him to universal control? Because He had dealt with the situation on earth, that none other had dealt with, or could deal with; because He was the Redeemer. Is there anything more arrestingly dramatic in all literature than the fifth chapter of the book of Revelation, in which we have the vision of the Throne, and in the right hand of the One Who sat upon the Throne a book written, and sealed with seals, a book as the sequel shows, of the order of procedure that shall bring the world at last to the hour when the Kingdom of God is perfectly established. Nobody was found to open that book or to look at it. That is the story of humanity all through the ages. Then the seer, with a beautiful human touch says, “ I wept much,” because there was nobody who could do it. One of the elders said to him, “ Weep

not; behold, the Lion"—the Eastern symbolism of authority and kingship—"the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book and the seven seals thereof."

Now listen. The seer turned to see the Lion, and what did he see? "A Lamb standing, as though it had been slain." We read our histories of human things and human activities; some of us have even read Mr. Wells! Oh that men would come back and look at the world from the Divine standpoint. He reigns, and His right to reign is found in the wound-prints in His hands, the Lamb slain, the Redeemer-King. That was the hour of His coronation, when He ascended.

Behold Him. Who is this? This is the God-man. We cannot say all there is to say about Jesus, when we say He is God; and we cannot say all there is to say about Jesus when we say He is man. The old phrasing of some of the old creeds is very fine, "Very God of very God." Yes, but also very Man of actual man. I am not discussing the mystery. I am facing the fact. The God-man is enthroned; He is reigning.

In the history of the God-man, there are three ages. First the age—measured by our calendars, a very short one—of His earthly life and mission, from His birth to His resurrection; the crib and the Cross and the crowning; that is the first age, about three and thirty years. The second age in the history of this Person began when He ascended, and we are in it now. Where it will end, no man knows. It will end when He comes again. The third age, the eternal age in His existence begins then, and stretches out unto the age of the ages. He will always be Jesus. When God in the mystery of His Sonship, stooped, and bent, and bowed, and came down and dwelt among us corporally, in bodily form, He identified Himself actually with humanity for ever. The time will never come when Jesus will cease to be. When thinking of Him, we need to recognise these three ages; the preparatory, the mighty dynamic age of His earthly career; then this processional age, from His ascension to His coming again, during which He reigns; and then the eternal age, in which as Redeemer, He will cease to reign.

"Then cometh the end, when He shall deliver up the Kingdom to God, even the Father . . . that God may be all in all."

Keep these three ages in mind when thinking of Him; and the first and the last will help us to understand the one in which we live to-day. "He must reign"; He is reigning now. He was not reigning in those three and a half years of public ministry.

He will not be reigning in His mediatorial capacity after the advent. It is now He reigns. He must reign, not *when* He has put His enemies under His feet, but “*till* He hath put all His enemies under His feet.”

Look again at that first age. What took place then? I see Him, and in Him I see God identified with humanity in nature. Softly hear me now and carefully, or you will misunderstand me; identified also with humanity in sin, but never in sinning. He was “made sin,” identified with humanity in sin, but never in sinning; and because never in sinning, He was able to put sin away, and so identify humanity with Himself in His victory over sin. Identified with humanity in the dark abysmal mystery of the Cross, He dealt with sin, cancelling it, and putting it away for ever. Consequently He opened the Kingdom of heaven to all believers.

When that first stage was over, He ascended to the right hand of God; and there He is to-day, the Lamb as it had been slain. When we read the book of Revelation, you may, if you like,—I am not arguing with you, I am not quarrelling, or differing from you, or agreeing with you—you may if you like say that He has not yet broken any of these seals, or that He has broken some. All I am insisting on is that the philosophy of Revelation is that the book of the administration of earthly affairs is in the hand of the Lamb that had been slain; and whatever happens, happens when He breaks the seal. There are terrible happenings, beasts and dragons, and all hell's beastliness belching itself out across the earth. Yes; but nothing happens except when He breaks the seal. Not the beasts, not the dragons, nor Apollyon, nor hell reigns; but the Lamb, Who is at the right hand of God.

That leads us to our second point briefly; the process of His reign. How is He reigning? I ask you to observe His demand. I ask you to watch His objective. I ask you to consider His method.

What is the demand of this reigning King? Purity, holiness, righteousness. You can take either of these words. In every one of them are the values of the others. The reign of the Redeemer is not in order to the lowering of the Divine standard of morality, is not in order that men and women who fail of holiness, may be admitted into the heaven of holiness. His one eternal demand is for rightness, holiness, purity. To that bears witness the ethical interpretation of His life. To that bears witness the ethical intention of His dying. He did not die to save me from hell. I give you a moment to think about that. He died to save me from sin, and so to save me from hell. It is

sin that He came to deal with. It is holiness that He came to realize. The reigning Christ over all the chaos of earth to-day, is demanding that; and this earth will never get peace until it gets purity. His demand is for purity.

What is His objective? Peace! He is the Prince of Peace, but peace eternally on the basis of purity. Oh those words, that have been so wonderfully sung and set to music till the world is engirdled to-day with the melody and the harmonies of them. Yet beautiful as they are, they are generally misinterpreted. When at His birth the angels sang, what sang they?

“Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace, good-will to men?”

They sang nothing of the kind, in spite of the Authorized Version, and in spite of our anthems and hymns. They sang,

“Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men in whom He is well pleased.”

A very different matter! God wills that the world shall have peace, but it must be built on purity; “peace among men in whom He is well-pleased.” That is the only way in which peace is coming. The reigning Christ will see to it, that the world never does get peace, until it gets it on the basis of holiness. His objective is peace.

And what is His method? You can take two words to cover the ground. Patience and power. Patience, the offer of His redemption to men. Power, the invasion of all things with His own ideals, and the compulsion laid upon evil to express itself completely in order to its own exhaustion. Watch the process of the ages and history, and watch from this standpoint. Again and again, the dark and catastrophic and cataclysmic hours, terrible in blood, and muck and misery, have meant the working out into visibility of the false thinking of men. Those of us who lived through it, will never forget those four years and three months of war. Whence came it? Who was to blame for it? Let us stop the inane inadequacy of blaming the Kaiser. Whence came the war? From the false thinking of men, from false philosophy; and that false philosophy was compelled by a pressure that it did not recognise, the pressure of God’s grasp upon all human life, to go on, to be logical, to express itself; and it did it at last in blood and muck and misery; and so was answered for evermore. That is how He is ever reigning.

That brings us to the last word, the consummation. The process will be victorious. Listen, He shall put down all rule, all authority, all power; they shall all be abolished. He shall

destroy the last enemy, which is death. What then is the vision that greets our eyes as we look through to the consummation of His reign? A completely redeemed and realized Kingdom of God. That is the goal of the God-man.

Then comes that final act, when He delivers the Kingdom to God, a Kingdom with no need of redeeming activity; God's redemption having wrought victoriously; at last God is over all, blessed for evermore. To that He moves.

Well, where am I? I am living by clock and calendar in hours all filled with doing little things, little things! Oh Holy Spirit lift us in this hour to see where we really are. We are in a world over which He reigns. We are in a world in which His redeeming activity is operating in mighty power, in spite of all hell. We are in a world in which hell is made hell in order to condemn and damn and banish it at last from the earth.

To see Christ so is to share His peace. To share His peace is to co-operate in His programme, to be enabled by His power, and to move through the passing hours with the tread of conquerors; knowing that at last His victory will be complete. I know His victory is assured, it is coming; but it seems to me in that last hour, whenever it be on the calendar of time, when the anthem shall roll around the world.

"The Kingdom of the world is become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ"; it seems to me I will not much want to join in the Hallelujahs, if I have not had some share in the travail that makes the triumph sure.

"I am a stranger here, within a foreign land,
My home is far away, upon a golden strand;
Ambassador to be of realms beyond the sea,
I'm here on business for my King.

This is the King's command, that all men everywhere,
Repent and turn away, from sin's seductive snare;
That all who will obey, with Him shall reign for aye,
And that's my business for my King.

This is the message that I bring,
A message angels fain would sing:
'Oh, be ye reconciled,'
Thus saith my Lord and King,
'Oh, be ye reconciled to God.' "

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