

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Special Messages		Pastor/Teacher
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The Enthroned Lord Jesus

Western culture, especially in America, is rapidly declining and doing it at almost breakneck speed. Evangelical Christians, in particular, often display the most concern about this dilapidating state of affairs. In some circles this has produced an enormous amount of political activism. Some of this is commendable but most of it, sad to say, is terribly misguided. Well-meaning Christians are engaged in what is referred to as a “Culture War” and are desperately trying to reclaim America’s soul as a “Christian nation.”¹ It surprises some people to hear this, but America was *never* a *Christian nation*. “No nation is ever that,” writes James Boice. “Only individuals are Christians. But at one time the country was at least permeated by a Christian ethos so that religion was encouraged, moral values were affirmed, families were intact, authority was respected, schools had wholesome environments, cities were safe, local communities flourished and people were proud to be Americans.”² H.L. Mencken, the noted essayist and literary critic of a past generation (and not even a professing Christian), made this observation: “There was a time, two or three centuries ago, when the overwhelming majority of educated men were believers, but that is apparently true no longer. Indeed, it is my impression that at least two-thirds of them are now frank sceptics.”³ If this were true in 1937, it is all the more so in 2014. Listen carefully again to the words of James Boice: “We live in bad days for the evangelical church, despite the false sense of security caused by increasing numbers of church members and escalating budgets. In the last few years writers such as David F. Wells (*No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* and *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* and most recently, *God in the Whirlwind*), Os Guinness (*Dining with the Devil*), John MacArthur (*Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World* and *Reckless Faith: When the Church Loses Its Will to Discern*), Michael Scott Horton (*Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church?*) and others have pointed out how evangelicals are being swallowed up by today’s secular culture, all because they have abandoned confidence in the power of God through the Bible to convert sinful, secular people and to train, establish and strengthen believers in godliness. They seek to grow worldly programs by worldly methods instead. To put it another way, evangelicals have abandoned a proper commitment to revealed truth and have become mere pragmatists. Instead of proclaiming and teaching God’s Word, the Bible, they are resorting to sermonettes of pop psychology, entertainment-style services and technological approaches to church growth, which is a formula not for the increase of true religion but for the end of it. Evangelical churches are growing, but they no longer have anything distinct to offer. They are popular in many places, but the prophetic, challenging voice of the Christian preacher and teacher, which has been the glory and strength of the church in all past ages, has been lost.”⁴ Evangelicalism has, in large measure, capitulated to this culture. The church’s agenda is being set by marketing techniques, entertainment enterprises, power politics, and celebrity-conscious personalities. In other words, she is being conformed to the pattern of this world and there is a steep price to be paid.

We looked last week at two of the threefold offices of Christ: Prophet and Priest. Today we will examine the third: King. The Lord Jesus reigns and His reign extends throughout *His* creation and in every culture. He sits at the Father’s right hand as Prophet, Priest and King. He possesses all those abilities, all those royal and glorious endowments necessary as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

I. THE ENSIGNS OF HIS KINGLY POWER

We read in Revelation 5:9 and 12 that the Lamb is *worthy* to receive adoration and praise. The grounds for this is His death and the blessings this has brought His people. He possesses power and wisdom to accomplish salvation. This echoes Isaiah 52:13 where we are told that the suffering Servant of the LORD “will act wisely.”

- A. Worthy to Receive Authority. In Matthew 28:18 Jesus declares, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Note that this was said *prior* to His ascension.
- B. Worthy of Riches. Wealth is associated with royalty. He has obtained an inheritance because He is heir of all things (Hebrews 1:1-4).⁵
- C. Worthy to Receive Strength. He not only has the authority, He has the power to rule as King. This is demonstrated in a number of ways, but notice how this is connected in Acts 2:33 with the outpourings of the Holy Spirit.
- D. Worthy of Honor and Glory. Honor is due Him. Glory was His before the foundation of the world (John 17:1-5).
- E. Worthy of Worship. R.T. France after surveying the entire NT on the subject concludes with these words, “Let us merely note the natural culmination of this process in the last book of the New Testament, where not only is Jesus (‘the Lamb’) regularly associated with God in his glory and sovereignty (e.g. Rev. 7:14-17; 11:15; 12:10; 14:1, 4; 20:6; 21:22f.; 22:1-4), but worship and praise are offered to him equally with the Father (Rev. 1:5f.; 5:8-14; 7:9-12; 22:3). The great doxologies of Revelation are not a new experiment involving the worship of one previously regarded in a less exalted light, but the proper expression of an attitude to Jesus which had been there from the beginning, increasing no doubt in intensity and in sophistication, but deriving from the impression made by Jesus himself during his earthly ministry.

“It is instructive to notice that these great doxologies of Revelation ground their praise of the Lamb on the work of salvation which he has accomplished by his death, and which his worshippers have experienced. A similar pattern has emerged in our study of the earlier New Testament material. The attitude of worship towards Jesus is often directly traceable to the Christians’ experience of his saving work. They found in Jesus forgiveness, revelation, new life, and thus they saw him to be fulfilling to them the functions of God himself, and they worshipped him.”⁶

“We wish to emphasize that the *sessio Christi* can be confessed only in faith. It is not a conclusion from our analysis of reality, for by faith alone can we recognize Christ crowned with all power in heaven and on earth, the head of his Church. In these days there is much confusion both in the world and in the Church; it is easy to lose sight of Christ’s scepter, and of the light that emanates from his once-for-all work of redemption. That work places Christ in the very center of the cosmos; He is the Light of the *world*.

“It is in this connection that the Church speaks of the significance of the *sessio Christi*. History does not follow its own course. When John on Patmos weeps because no one is worthy to open the book in the right hand of him who sat on the throne, then the encouraging answer is: ‘Weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book and the seven seals thereof’ (Rev. 5:5). John sees the Lamb there, *standing* as it had been *slain* (vs. 6). It is as though a window is opened upon the full dynamic of history, and we are vividly reminded of all that took place. The entire chapter centers around what the Lamb of God accomplished in the historical fulfillment of prophecy (cf. Rev. 5:5, Gen. 49:9-10, Isa.

11:1, Rev. 22:10; see also Rev. 5:9, 12, 13) and especially around Christ's victory. Christ's decisive work definitely concerns the world and history. In Revelation he is called 'Lord of lords and King of kings' (17:14)."⁷

CONCLUSION: James R. Edwards in his outstanding book *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* has a chapter entitled "Is a Savior from Sin Meaningful in a Day of Moral Relativism?" In it he notes that, "The least attractive aspect of Christianity to many seekers is probably its doctrine of sin. People want religion to be something that affirms them and makes them feel good. There are enough problems in life without being made to feel we are bad. And besides, the notion does not ring true. Most of us feel that a grim doctrine of sin may describe a notorious remnant in the world – the Adolf Hitlers and Osama bin Ladens and so forth – but how could it describe us? I spent two years in the late 1960s working with street kids in West Harlem in New York City. They were a rough bunch, by and large, and they did many bad things. They stoutly resisted the idea that they were sinners, however. Some of them would punch you out if necessary to convince you that they were as good as the next guy.

"Christianity, however, makes the serious indictment that we are without excuse, whoever we are, 'for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things' (Romans 2:1). The plain sense of this indictment seems to us preposterous. We read and hear of terrible things that people do all the time. We also rebel against the insinuation that we have either done or could do such things. We are hopefully right on the first account, but that may not be entirely to our credit. Most of us have not been given the opportunity of doing the things we abhor in others. Yet we are entirely capable of hatching grim plots mentally against our enemies. What we would do if we had the power and opportunity to do them remains an open question."

He goes on to spell out the importance of realizing the nature of sin and how our culture has lost the Biblical understanding of sin due to the effects of pluralism and moral relativism. "Let me clarify that I am not referring to pluralism as a social virtue guaranteeing the rights of society to those who consent to live responsibly within those rights. I take it for granted that this kind of practical pluralism cannot be compromised without compromising the foundations of a democratic society. The pluralism I have in mind is not practical pluralism, but rather an ideological pluralism that is an outgrowth of the individualism of our culture. Individualism asserts that individuals are the sole arbiters of their existence, and that they should be able to do whatever they please. Ideological pluralism is the other side of the coin of individualism. It demands that we grant to others the same right we expect them to grant to us: the right to self-expression, regardless of its social or moral consequences. In ideological pluralism, objective virtues are replaced by subjective opinions. When virtues are replaced by subjective judgments, then statements about virtue become like color preferences. One opinion of right or wrong, virtue or vice, beauty or ugliness is as valid as another."⁸

Christ reigns not only in His church by His Word and Spirit, He reigns in the world. It is true that all fallen human beings (and their cultures) are in rebellion against God's anointed One (Psalm 2), but this does not prevent Him from ruling and carrying out His purposes. Christians are called into His service. Our vocation is to serve King Jesus in His church and in the world.

ENDNOTES

¹ The conviction that America is (or was) a Christian nation is traceable, in many cases, to the role the pilgrims played in our nation's history and to the impact their descendants had over the next three centuries, particularly in the last century. "Evangelicals have not always been a beleaguered minority in American society. In fact, their attempt to Christianize American society in the nineteenth century is a remarkable success story. In contrast to their declining fortunes in the Revolutionary era, Christians after 1800 accomplished so much that historians are led to describe that period of American history as an 'Evangelical Empire.'" *The Gospel in America: Themes in the Story of America's Evangelicals*, eds. J.D. Woodbridge, M.A. Noll, N.O. Hatch (Zondervan, 1979), p. 216.

² J.M. Boice, *Two Cities, Two Loves: Christian Responsibility in a Crumbling Culture* (IVP, 1996), pp. 7, 8.

³ H.L. Mencken's Obituary of J. Gresham Machen: "Dr. Fundamentalism," *The Baltimore Evening Sun* (Jan. 18, 1937).

⁴ Boice, op. cit., p. 28.

⁵ The Bible does not allow wealth and riches to be monopolized by the type of crass materialism that permeates our society. Listen to this summary by Moulton: "*Ploutos* comes from the same root as the Greek verb *pimplemi*, I fill, and is connected etymologically with the Latin word from which 'plenty' comes, with the Sanskrit *puṇam*, and with the English 'fill.' And it is true that we are made far more rich, full, complete (another word from the same root) on the spiritual level than we can ever be on the material. The New Testament therefore uses our series of words for riches thirty times in a spiritual sense." H.K. Moulton, *The Challenge of the Concordance* (Bagster, 1977), p. 202.

⁶ R.T. France, "The Worship of Jesus: A Neglected Factor in Christological Debate" in *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology Presented to Donald Guthrie* (IVP, 1982), p. 33.

⁷ G.C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ* (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 227.

⁸ J.R. Edwards, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Eerdmans, 2005), pp. 142-144.