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CREATIVE PREACHING.

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(The following article is the inaugural address of Dr. Atkins as Professor in Auburn Seminary, delivered May 4, 1927. Owing to lack of space, a few paragraphs here and there have been omitted.—Editor.)

Preaching is, in one form or another, one of the oldest crafts in the world. The first light of Council fires must have fallen upon the face of some paleolithic preacher, upon whom vision or conviction had laid a message to be said. He had no tools but words, nor any force save his passion to persuade, and his own persuasion that something beyond himself spoke through him. And when he was done, something would be true and real, which was not truly real before. His words would become customs and battles and migrations. They would build an altar and light a fire upon it. They would be wrought into the changing structure of society and he and his like would have bequeathed to unborn generations, rostrums and forums and pulpits to outlast nations and thrones, and be perpetually renewed though all the works of men should flee away and ancient and holy things fade like a dream. You may search out, thread by thread, as you please, the weaving of such a web as this. The power of the persuaded to persuade is there, and the power of the impassioned to rekindle

THE REGNANT CHRIST.

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Text: "For He must reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet."—1 Cor. 15:25.

(The following sermon was preached before the Women's Council at Montreat, N. C., in the summer of 1927; and also as the opening sermon of the Synod of Georgia, Decatur, Ga., October 4, 1927, by Dr. Anderson as the retiring Moderator. Dr. Anderson's book of sermons, entitled "God's World and Word", is reviewed elsewhere in this number of the Review. See pp. 37-38.—Editor.)

The book of Revelation abounds in symbols, with which oriental literature is saturated. But the symbolic is a method of expression puzzling to occidental minds. So wild and weird have been many interpretations put upon these symbols that many earnest Christians have become skeptical of the possibility of really understanding this closing book of the Bible, and so in spite of the blessing promised to him that readeth and understandeth its message, Revelation is perhaps the most neglected book in the Scriptures. Yet these symbols all have a definite meaning, and in this and other books of the Bible the Holy Spirit has furnished an interpretation of them that if gathered together would supply us with what might be termed a Glossary, or Dictionary of Symbols.

This greatly neglected fact finds illustration in the use of numerical symbols. The use, for example, of the number "three" in various passages establishes it as the symbolical designation of divinity; "four" appears as the symbol of worldly affairs or persons, while "seven" is even popularly understood as the symbol of completeness. The "seven Spirits of God" thus represent not seven Spirits, but the one Spirit with perfect wisdom, a figure of omniscience; and "the seven

horns" signify fullness of power. The seven golden candlesticks are interpreted by our Lord Himself in the text, while the use of other symbols, such as "trees" for outstanding personalities, "mountains" for great civic organizations, "islands" for lesser civic groups, "the sea" for separation and sorrow, all find interpretation in the Bible itself.

Such an inspired "glossary of terms", if we would take the trouble of making it for ourselves, would shed a flood of light on many passages that have tormented the minds of God's people, and left them a prey to sensation mongers in every age. What a light would be thrown upon a passage like Rev. 6:13—16, if people understood that "the falling stars" do not refer to literal stars, and the earthquakes and falling mountains have no reference to physical phenomena except as illustrative of great social and national upheavals!

The importance of understanding in some measure its symbols is even more strikingly illustrated in Rev. 5, where John is told that "the Lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed to open" the sealed book of God's eternal purpose; but when he looks he beholds not a lion at all, but "a Lamb as it had been slain". To one unfamiliar with symbolism here is a monstrous absurdity, but to one who is familiar with its method of expression there is given a disclosure of divine love and power carrying out the gracious purpose of God that has enshrined the symbolism in the hearts of all who love the Lord.

An Enthroned Christ.

The book of Revelation represents Christ as holding in His pierced hand—His right hand of power—all the prerogatives of Omnipotence, and the first chapter reveals Him as possessing all the attributes of Deity. He appropriates to Himself the incommunicable Name of God "I AM"; He is clothed with all the habiliments of royal dignity and holds in His hand the keys of divine power: He inhabiteth Eternity, as the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, of all things. He it is Who is alive and was dead, and is alive forever more.

Chapter 4, with its revelation of the glory of the God of Creation and Providence, is a prologue to Chapter 5, where we have unveiled the glory of redemptive love, symbolized by the Lamb in the midst of the throne, receiving all authority directly from God Himself, and directing and interpreting all things, adored by the whole universe.

Is Jesus Now Enthroned?

Is Jesus represented in this book, and elsewhere in the Scriptures, as enthroned now, or is He yet, at some time near or remote, "at the end of the age", to be enthroned? The question goes to the very heart of many of the problems of the Church, and vitally affects our attitude toward the present disturbed and distracted age. Two conflicting views are held at this time. One group of interpreters teach that the events described in Revelation in its unfolding of a great, world-wide drama are to occur after the present dispensation has come to an end and our Lord has returned in His power and glory. It is by no means strange that the advocates of this "futuristic" interpretation are pessimistic concerning the outlook for Christianity today, and are convinced that the Church itself is in the midst of the days of the last great apostasy, days that must grow ever darker until Jesus Himself returns to reign. The other interpretation is that Revelation and kindred passages in other books of the Bible describe events that have been happening since our Lord ascended to His throne of glory, in ever widening cycles of fulfillment, and that they describe Jesus as reigning now. This is the confessional position of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, when it says that Christ is now exercising His Kingly office in "ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all His and our enemies".

What Do the Scriptures Teach?

The answer, however, for God's people to such a question as this must be found in some definite and explicit teaching of the

Bible itself: Rev. 1:1-3 speaks of the "things which must shortly come to pass, for the time is at hand". Rev. 4:1 tells of the things which "shall be hereafter". The word "hereafter" literally means "after this", and as one has recently said, "Tomorrow is just as much 'hereafter' as two thousand years hence". The text explicitly states that "Christ must reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet", 1 Cor. 15:25. Acts 7:55, 56 describes Stephen as "being full of the Holy Ghost when he looked steadfastly into heaven and saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.'" That is, he saw Jesus enthroned in glory standing in an attitude of kingly ministry for His people. Paul is equally explicit when he cries, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather is risen again, Who is even at the right hand of God," Rom. 8:24; and again, "Our Lord Jesus Christ is the blessed and only Potentate, King of kings and Lord of lords", 1 Tim. 6:15.

Thus with a clarity and definiteness unsurpassed in their statements concerning any other matter the Scriptures teach that Jesus is even now enthroned in the glory and power of His Kingdom.

WHY Jesus Was Crowned King?

It will clear up many matters for us if we realize that we are thus in the midst of the Messianic Reign of Jesus. The throne which He occupies is not that which belonged to Him of divine right, but was bestowed upon Him Who, though possessing all divine prerogatives, so that He needed not to "snatch" at them, as a robber snatches at his booty, "emptied Himself, and took on Him the form of a servant"—it was such an One that God exalted. It is the throne of His Messianic Kingdom on which He sits "exalted", because, first of all, of His princely character as the Son of Man. "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; THEREFORE God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above

Thy fellows." Heb. 1:9. It is characteristic, therefore, of such a King that His sceptre should be described as "the sceptre of righteousness". The Mediatorial Throne has been given to Jesus specifically as a reward not merely of His character, perfected through sufferings, but for His sacrificial service on the Cross.

Christ being in the form of God, so that "He thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross, WHEREFORE God also hath highly exalted Him and hath given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Phil. 2:6-11.

When Was Jesus Crowned?

The circumstances attending this exaltation of Jesus, including the fixing of the very day of His Coronation, are described with a wealth of detail unsurpassed in any other event of His life.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews dates the Coronation of Jesus as taking place after His meditorial sacrifice for which His Kingdom was bestowed upon Him: The Son, Whom God had appointed heir of all things, "being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, WHEN He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of God" (Heb. 1:2, 3); and again, "This Man (speaking of Jesus), after He had offered one sacrifice for sins, forever sat down at the right hand of God" (10:12). Mark, however, fixes for us the very day of His Coronation. It was the day of His Ascension: "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat at the right hand of God" (16:19). The earthward side of this wonderful story of the greatest day of all history gives a glimpse of Mount Olivet with the risen

Jesus surrounded by His disciples, "and as He blessed them, He was parted from them, and a cloud received Him out of their sight"—that is, they watched His human body, as one would watch an aeroplane, until it was hidden by a cloud from their sight. It was the transfer—the processional—of the Son of Man from this little earth of ours to the glory of heaven.

The Coronation hymn, written for the occasion centuries before (Ps. 24), enables us to look behind and beyond this physical veil, and to follow Jesus to the very battlements of heaven, crowded with expectant hosts who cry to each other antiphonal chorus:

(Before the Gates.)

First Choir.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates,
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of Glory shall come in.

Second Choir.

Who is the King of Glory?

First Choir.

The Lord, strong and mighty,
The Lord, mighty in battle.

First Choir.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates,
Even lift them up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of Glory shall come in.

Second Choir.

Who is the King of Glory?

First Choir.

The Lord of Hosts,
He is the King of Glory.*

As we listen to this Antiphonal sung on the battlements of heaven, we soon learn that it is but the Prelude to God's great Oratorio of Redemption with its Hallelujah Chorus of un-created and created spirits of the whole Universe. For the Apocalypse ushers in through the gates to the very throne of the Lord God Almighty, with whose dignity and glory the Triumphant Christ is invested. (Rev. 5.) It is, indeed, a divinely inspired description of the closing scene of Christ's Coronation Day:

"I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven—and behold, a throne was set, and One sat on the throne—and there was a rainbow round about the throne in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats, and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders, clothed in white raiment, and they had on their heads crowns of gold. And I saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And He came and took the book—(the book of God's eternal counsel concerning humanity)—out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne.

"And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints.

"And they sung a new song, saying, 'Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation—

"And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and

*Moulton's Modern Readers' Bible.

thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

"And every creature, which is in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, 'Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb forever and ever.

"And the four living creatures said 'Amen'. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped Him that liveth for ever and ever". And Jesus sat down at the right hand of God, "from henceforth expecting until His enemies be made His footstool". Rev. 4 and 5.

What Is the Enthroned Christ Doing on That Throne?

Here is a question whose answer should thrill every Christian heart with joy. For, first of all, Jesus, enthroned in power and glory, is bestowing gifts and graces upon His Church, endowing His people with power for service. Peter describes this as the first royal act of the enthroned King: "This Jesus," he declares in the first Christian sermon ever preached; "this Jesus, whom ye crucified, God raised up, whereof we are witnesses. THEREFORE being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the gift of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed abroad this, which ye now see and hear." Acts 2:23. Paul amplified this description of the first exercise of royal authority by the Messiah-King, writing, "When He had ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men, for the perfecting of the saints in their work of ministering, for the building up of the body of Christ." Eph. 4:8, 12.

Jesus, enthroned in power and glory, is waging today, as He has waged throughout the centuries since His Coronation, active, aggressive, unremitting warfare against all His and His people's enemies. "For," says the text, "He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet." This warfare

is still raging, "for we see not yet all things put under Him, but we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour", and John on the isle of Patmos saw Him in symbolic vision riding upon the white horse of victory, "conquering and to conquer". This is He of Whom David prophesied when he sang, "The Lord said unto my Lord, sit Thou on my right hand until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool". (Ps. 110:1.)

We are thus living today amidst the blessing of the progressively victorious and glorious Messianic Reign of Jesus, which is to have a final and even more glorious consummation. For says Paul in the context from which the text is taken, "Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father, when He shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power, for He must reign UNTIL He hath put all enemies under His feet. And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all." 1 Cor. 15:24, 25, 28.

A Message of Cheer.

The neglected but wonderful fact of the present Messianic reign of the enthroned Christ brings a message of cheer in the midst of the moral and spiritual unrest of the times, when the hearts of many of God's own people fail them for fear. Jesus is not going to reign, some sweet day, by and by, but is even now enthroned in power at the right hand of God. When He was down here He knew well the darkness of apparent defeat and the power of the Evil One. And yet amidst the gathering gloom He cried, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven", and again, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, now is the Prince of this world cast out". God alone knows how many today need the heartening of such a vision of Christ enthroned, of triumph foreseen and assured. This triumph of Christ for those who know and love Him is a fact accomplished. Jesus sits enthroned in majesty and holds in His pierced hand the

power of Omnipotence, and this power ensures the ultimate triumph of the Army of the Cross.

Thousands still recall with beating heart the dark days of the First Battle of the Marne, when the Allied Army was driven back in seemingly hopeless rout, and the pessimism of despair gripped the souls of men. Yet there was one man whose faith never faltered. Surrounded by despairing, fleeing thousands, and in the presence of a triumphant and exultant foe, Joffre calmly waited the hour to strike, when victory should be snatched from the jaws of defeat.

What a lesson for us in these dark days, when fearful hearts predict the breaking up and destruction, not of Christianity only, but of all civilization! We shall go forth with a new hope in our hearts and a new light shining in our faces if we can only accept as a fact what the Word of God is at such pains to teach, that Jesus reigns, and because He sits enthroned His Church can never know disaster or defeat.

A Triumph Delayed.

The triumphant progress of the Army of the Cross is halted only by our failure to cooperate in the King's plans. The supreme moment of all history, the Second Coming of our Lord, when, having put all enemies under His feet, He shall surrender his mediatorial sovereignty to God, even the Father, tarries only upon us. Christ is to conquer the world, not by physical force, which He could have put forth at any time through all these centuries of His reign, not by angelic cohorts, waiting in glory to do His bidding, but through men and women, redeemed by His grace, upon whom he breathes His Spirit of power, and on whom he bestows the gifts and graces of His love.

Upon Presbytery, Synod and Assembly, upon pastors and people, upon Sunday schools, Auxiliaries and Mission Boards, He is waiting to bestow His royal enduement of power. Are we ready to receive it? When we are, every problem of the Kingdom will have been solved and the King shall come again.