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**Memorial Celebration**

OF THE

**ONE HUNDRED AND THIR-  
TY-FOURTH ANNIVERSARY**

OF

**Rock Presbyterian Church**

GREENWOOD, S. C.

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THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

*Anniversary Discourse*

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# The Mission of the Church

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Texts:

*Matthew xvi. : 16. On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

*1 Timothy iii. : 15. The church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

*Acts i. : 8. Ye shall be witnesses unto \* \* \* the uttermost parts of the earth.*

*In Matthew xvi. Christ's sublime claim may be freely translated: "Faith in me as the Messiah, sent and equipped to be the Savior of men, is the foundation of noble character, and of righteous, enduring civilization." From Christ's day to our own there has been an endless succession of men, strong like Peter, whose manhood has been nourished on this faith. The powers of hell have never prevailed against them. The men holding this faith constitute the church, God's kingdom in the world. No single denomination includes them all. The kingdom of heaven cannot be contained in a single church any more than a stone cathedral can contain the starry sky.*

We celebrate by fitting ceremonies, the centennial of old Rock Church, a part of that august kingdom which has endured through the ages. When we review the history of this church, and reflect upon the lives of its founders, and the successive generations of its officers and members, our thoughts naturally turn to the meaning and significance of that glorious body, the church of God, of which this congregation is a member. The interest, the importance and magnitude of the church and its work exceed those of all other organized bodies on earth. It is the kingdom of God. It engaged His thought in eternity, and has been the object of His care many thousands of years in time. To guide its course He sent patriarchs, prophets and apostles. His servants endured pains and death for its welfare. He sends forth the angels of heaven in its service. It is a supernatural creation maintained by divine care.

## THE CHURCH'S MISSION IN THE WORLD.

The mission of the church on earth is to be the witness and the support of God's truth. It is His agent to declare His mind, to reveal His character, to execute His will, and to do His work among men. "Ye are witnesses of me, and for me," is a brief



translation of our Lord's commission to the church. He Himself is "the faithful and true witness" of the Father's character and love, wisdom and purpose toward men. The work of the church is to witness unto, and carry into effect, the wish and plan of Christ. The church is His body, and He is the head. He is the vine and His people are the branches. The thought and purpose that proceed from the head are to permeate the body. The life of the vine is to vitalize and make fruitful the branches.

The church, as witness to Christ's life and character, and the agent of His purpose, must share, and make her own the interests that engaged His heart and energy. The great interest that filled and absorbed His soul was man. Love for man drew Him from the skies. Every phase and act of His life expressed His profound interest in men.

1. *The church is a witness to Christ's love.* Christ saw in men a potential value and worth through the pardon He could bestow, the life He could give, and the righteousness He could impute and implant. He valued man not on account of dress or rank or race, but because he was man, bearing the image of God. In the presence of man His soul thrilled with sympathy, His heart went out in yearning pity. "He was moved with compassion when He saw the multitudes. He won the confidence of Zaccheus. He drew to himself the publicans and sinners. He heard the plaintive call of blind Bartimeus above the uproar of the crowd." His supreme end and desire was to draw men to himself and form them into a kingdom, obedient to His will, and responsive to His love. "He went about doing good"—to men. He came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister. His life was a ceaseless outpouring of himself in the service of men. His miracles were a ministry of love and power, helping the suffering, relieving the distressed, and comforting the troubled. Like Him the church is to live a life of service. She is a witness to her Master's love for men.

2. *Christ's interest in men regarded them as lost.* "The son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." This fact gave tone and form to His pity. It intensified His yearning. He recognized and emphasized a fact in their condition whose full significance men did not fully comprehend. He expresses His own sense of their lost state, and their comparative lack of appreciation of it in the very drapery of the parables which set forth the fact, and in the form of His own efforts to meet it: "I came to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." He represents himself as the faithful, pitying shepherd, seeking the lost sheep, and rejoicing over it when found.

What is Christ's conception of a lost man? What is it to be lost? It is to be away from the place where one belongs, and in danger of not getting back. A child crying on the street of a great city, away from its parents where it belongs, is lost. There is hope for it if it knows that it is lost and cries for its parents. Jesus saw men lost from God where they belonged. He saw them alienated from their Father in their selfishness and wayward sinfulness, drifting further away from God, away from man, away from their inheritance, their possible rights and privileges, and He was moved with compassion. He revealed God to them as the seeking Father, yearning over lost sons. In men's potential value and worth He saw what the Father wished and meant them to be, and the awful loss they sustained in wandering away from their privileges, and in drifting from the character that might be theirs, the destiny they might enjoy, the Father and the home where they belonged. The church continues Christ's witness to the truth that men are lost from the God to whom they belong, and she must stretch the seeking hand, guided by the yearning heart, to lost men whom Christ, through her agency, may find and restore.

3. *The church is a witness to Christ's love for man dead in sin.* Christ's interest in men was prompted by the consciousness not of what He could get from them, but what He could give to them. He came to give of His fulness unto those who were empty. He was rich and became poor to make men rich. He saw men as dead and He came to give them life. He stands as the unique personage in history whose interest in men was intensified by the fact that they were dead, and He came to bestow life. "I came that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." "I lay down my life for my sheep." He came to give men eternal life. He, Himself, is the life and the light of men; hence in imparting Himself He gives life to men who are dead, and the bestowal of this life makes them like Himself.

In His thought life is love and love is life. Life is service, love to God and love to man. Giving life to men is, in His conception, imparting to them God-likeness. To be, to do, to love and to live, like God is to have life. He felt a generous, royal interest in man as the possible recipient of His own endless life of love and service. To call men to the love and ministry, to the sympathy and help of their fellow-men in order to bring them to God and make them like Him—this is life. Jesus was not appalled by the fact that men were dead in tres-



passes and sins. Indifference or despair would chill and paralyze a mere human soul in the presence of such a fact, but the consciousness in His divine spirit of abundant life to give, made Him hopeful and buoyant in His call of every dead Lazarus from the tomb of sin.

His life pulsates through His church, and she is His witness to His power to raise men from the death of sin. She must give her testimony to His truth, that out of Christ and away from God, men are dead, and that to live, Christ must be in them, and this truth she must proclaim with the confident hope that rests upon infinite love and omnipotent power. The church is untrue to Christ, a false witness, a broken pillar, if she yields to despair, or freezes into indifference over sinning men who can be made alive and God-like through the life and love of Christ.

4. *The church is a witness to the moral order and the righteousness of life and character which Christ came to reveal and promote among men.*

He was the "Holy One," "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." He was the example and the prophet of righteousness. He sought men as lost, gave life to them as dead, in order that they might be holy. The church is His witness and agent to build up men in holiness.

The first message of His forerunner, and of His apostles was "Repent, cease from sin, live holy lives." In all His teaching, righteousness is held forth as the supreme interest of life. He sets forth the ideal of a moral harmony to which life must conform. In its essence, on the practical side, this moral harmony meant obedience to God's will, conformity to His law. In its results, it meant man's welfare and blessedness, the soul filled with peace, and life irradiated with joy. In His thought the value and dignity of personality consisted in its possibility of friendship with God, maintained by conformity with God's ideal of human life, revealed in Him, and made actual by men living in Him and for Him, and He living in them. Righteousness, in Christ's teaching, is another word for the ideal moral order of the world; God's will for the world—established in the individual heart through His truth and spirit. Christ's spirit of righteousness in men makes them reverent towards the moral order of the world, as His ideal of what all men should be and do; and zealous, like Him, in bringing all men into harmony with that order; zealous to make all men lovers of God's order and doers of His righteousness. The kingdom of Heaven in the heart fills the soul with longing, and the life with activity to establish that kingdom in all hearts.

The church is Christ's witness and agent for righteousness in the world. She stands for His ideal of the moral order of the world. By her doctrine and example she manifests our Lord's regard for the individual man, as one in whom His kingdom may be established, by whom His will may be done, through whom His ideal moral order may be realized and extended.

The church is a preacher of God's righteousness, because her head was the prophet, the incarnation of that righteousness. To her, as to her Lord, each human life is sacred, because that life may be and should be, an exponent of righteousness. Her very existence is a continuous fulfillment, and pledge of complete fulfillment, of the prophecy: "Righteousness shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." Her life is a ceaseless utterance of the prayer, taught by her Head: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Her work is an unending and august repetition of the command: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

She is the foe of disorder, because she reveres God's order, enjoining order among all men. She is the protestant against violence and cruelty because her king is the "Prince of Peace," and the God of love. Her presence and work in the world, if she is loyal to her head, through the pervasive and elevating influence of her teachings and practice, make her a mighty agency in strengthening and purifying all other agencies for the defence of human rights, and the promotion of human welfare.

While distinct from the State in her sphere and functions, yet through the spirit of her faith and life, she is the defender of political freedom and right against tyranny and wrong, the guardian of legal justice against judicial corruption, the upholder of civic virtue and patriotism. She condemns the lawlessness, violence and cruelty of mobs and lynchings, that defy law, insult order, and trample upon decency and the rights of God and man. This she does, not by invading the province and usurping the functions of the State in political propaganda, civic and legal manifestoes—but by faithfully preaching and living the gospel of righteousness, committed to her as a sacred trust to be proclaimed to all men, as the moral order of the world, which Christ came to establish in, and over all men.

The righteousness of God in man! God's moral order of the world in man! This Christ revealed, illustrated in Himself, and commissioned His church as a witness to its reality, beauty and grandeur!

He loved man. He so loved him that He died for him, so



that man believing on Him might have everlasting life. Living this eternal life is living the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven. Love that dies for those loved is anxious to give the best and highest thing within its bestowal to the object of its love. Glowing zeal for righteousness, burning anxiety to make men righteous filled the soul of Christ. "Righteousness exalteth a nation," likewise a man! Righteousness is man's exaltation—and this was Christ's aim—the exaltation of man through righteousness. A noble mission! It is no less than the work of striving to bring all men to share in the highest and best within the gift of God—the highest and best thing in the universe—God's righteousness! Harmony with God's moral order! In league and friendship with God and man, working together for the coming of that "far off, divine event," when all men shall be in God's kingdom, and God's kingdom in them. When God's moral order shall be in men—and men shall be in harmony with God, with one another, and with the universe. A glorious consummation, that shall satisfy the soul-travail of the Son of God Himself!

" \* \* \* When all men's good  
 Shall be each man's rule, and universal peace  
 Shall lie like a shaft of light across the land,  
 And like a lane of beams across the sea,  
 Thro' all the circle of the golden year."

5. *The church is Christ's witness to the brotherhood of man, and to His authority in commissioning her to proclaim, and give effect to this great truth.*

The righteous kingdom formed from the men whom Christ loved, found, made alive and holy, constitutes a great brotherhood of righteous men, commissioned by Christ to proclaim the brotherhood of the race, and to invite and win men of every age, and race, and clime, to come into fellowship with Christ and His people. Christ seeking and giving life, and His bestowal of righteousness, are not confined to one race, or land. He is the Savior of man, and gathers His subjects from every people and clime. He gave His disciples a world-wide commission: "Go ye into all the world." "The gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world." His disciples went to all the nations known to men, calling into the special brotherhood of saints, men from all the brotherhood of the race.

The duty of gathering and perfecting the saints in the kingdom of Christ, His Church and body, was made sacred by the double fact that the order was given by the great elder brother, to go to men in all lands who were brothers, in blood, and in

the common possession of God's image, to those who bore the message. Thus the duty was reinforced by the sanction of authority, and by the impulse and yearning begotten of a universal kinship. Debased and degraded, many of these kinsmen were and are. But however sunk in sin, and disfigured by vice, they were men who were brother-men—for whom Christ died. It is the wish and will of Christ that His church should share the yearning which He felt for all the nations of one blood dwelling on the face of the earth.

The church goes forth on her mission, preaching in all the world to brothers lost from God's great family. It is her privilege and right to expect the equipment of Christ's love, wisdom and power for the great task. "Go preach my gospel——— for all power in heaven and earth is given unto me; and lo I am with you alway." Christ, the all-powerful, delighted to use His power in gathering unto Himself, from Jew and Gentile, from Greek and Roman, from bond and free, a brotherhood of regenerated men who were to echo His love and go forth to their brother-men with the power of their Christ, and draw them to their common, elder brother. Christ encourages His people to covet and obtain power for the bad, and over the bad, to make them good.

The church, then is a society, a kingdom, Christ's body, with the same life and purpose that animated her head. He gave this body titles expressive of His people's work and duties, and at the same time solemn exhortations and encouragements to do their work wisely, reverently and earnestly, as for Him whose command they obeyed, and for them to whom He bore His message. The titles, significant of their work, were such as these: "The salt of the earth," "Leaven," "Lights or light-bearers of the world." Their mission, thus indicated, was to bring men into a larger life, the life of God. They were to lead men to live for the distant, the unseen, future consummation of God's great plan of wisdom and love. They wrought in partnership with Christ, and with one another in a grand, co-operative life, wooing and winning their brother-men into this same partnership.

What a wonderful agency is the church of Christ, through which God's gentleness makes men great! Many things in the world and human life tend to depress the spirit, and discourage the hearts of men. The world is so vast, and man is so little, that the soul is in danger of falling into despair. But, through Christ, men are cheered with the reminder that this is God's world, for which the elder brother died; and the men who are so little and mean, are yet men, for whom Christ died.



The gospel is God's agency for saving men from being crushed by the sense of the world's vastness and man's littleness. We stand in awe and wonder in the contemplation of an agency so wonderful. Truly, it is the power of divine wisdom, and the expression of divine love!

We would expect such an institution to have a history worthy of its origin, and a destiny commensurate with its purpose. The church has had a wide influence on every phase of the world's life. Its temples of worship are features in the landscapes of every civilized country. Hundreds of millions of the world's wealth are invested in its buildings and institutions. It has modified the laws, and influenced the courts of every land. With its pulpits, its Sunday schools, and its literature in books and periodicals, it exercises a mighty influence on the intellect and morals of the world. It is like a vast university with its manifold departments scattered over the world, shaping the thought and guiding the life of men.

"This mighty institution, the Church of God, is beneficent in its aims, unselfish in its plans, and impartial in the distributions of its blessings. It is devoted to both the temporal and the eternal interests of mankind. Every corner stone it lays is laid for humanity. Every temple it builds is open to the world. Every altar it rears is for the salvation of souls. Its church spires are fingers pointing heavenward. Its ministers are messengers of good tidings, ambassadors of hope, and angels of mercy. What among man can compare with the church's power to educate, elevate, and civilize mankind?"

Our forefathers, one hundred and thirty years ago established this church whose anniversary we celebrate. The dust of the Godly men and women of those olden days sleeps under the stones of yonder tombs. You, of this generation, enter into their labors, animated by the same faiths and hopes that strengthened their hearts. Your names to-day are linked with theirs on the church rolls. Your lives are linked with theirs in the fellowship of one common Savior. May this church long endure, gathering into its fold successive generations for ages to come. May the songs and the prayers of the congregations here assembled be echoed by solid walls of stone, that shall rise into a stately and enduring edifice, through the loving zeal and liberality of those who now form the membership of this part of Christ's body.

God of our fathers, abide with Thy people evermore. Help us to live in Thee and for Thee, in the conscious fellowship of the saints of all ages; and in the glorious assurance that "Our Citizenship in Heaven.

