

The Seated Christ.

BY REV. W. N. HUTCHINS, M. A.

Hebrews 10 : 12.

"But this man after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever sat down on the right hand of God."

As we might expect little is said in the Gospels of the Ascension of Jesus, for there was little to record save the bare fact itself and occasional foretellings of the event by Jesus Himself. But when one enters the rest of the New Testament and mingles with the disciples after the Resurrection and the forty days of our Lord's triumphant lingering on the earth which He had redeemed, he finds himself in the presence of men with whom the Ascension was a master truth, a supreme and dominating fact, who never thought of Jesus as other than their living Lord or as elsewhere than on the Throne of God at His right hand. To them Jesus of Nazareth was not so much the Christ of history, a being belonging to the past, a person to be remembered, as He was to them the living Christ, regnant in the ever passing present and seated with God on the throne. Remember how on the day of Pentecost Peter explained the occurrences of the day by the Ascension! Remember how Paul swept in one comprehensive glance the whole process of redemption and had this for his climax. "It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Remember how in the First Epistle of John the mediatorial ministry of the Ascended Lord is set forth as the last line of defence in the Christian life, the final resource in peril. "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not; and if any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous!" Thus while very little is written in the Gospels concerning the Ascension everywhere else one finds himself associating with men with whom it was the atmosphere of faith and who argued from it as from the Resurrection for the validity of Christ's claims and for the effectiveness of His work. Indeed that is just what the writer is doing in the passage before us. So vitally, so strongly, so effectively has the thought of Jesus as risen, regnant, ascended, living, laid hold upon him that he makes it the basis of his argument for the Lordship and Saviourhood of Jesus Christ. "This man," he writes in contrast with the long line of priests who had served at Jewish altars, "this man after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever sat down on the right hand of God." To the discerning thought the Ascension was no bare unilluminate fact, but a truth which was at once a revelation and an argument—an argument for the triumph of his ministry and a revelation of his repose and regnancy. In the thought of the Seated Christ with its argument and revelation I find the message of the morning.

I. First of all the position and attitude of Christ—seated at God's right—have an authoritative word with respect to our Saviour's atonement for they attest the completeness, sufficiency and perpetuity of Calvary's sacrifice. How significant is the attitude! seated at the right hand of God. Why is He seated? In the language of symbols what does the attitude mean? Why is He not here as elsewhere represented as standing? Ah, how significant is the attitude of the Ascended Lord! For why is He seated but because, as He declared from the Cross, His redemptive ministry is finished, sin has been dealt with and dealt with completely; in every phase and consequence His great propitiatory sacrifice has reckoned with human transgression? Like a stream poisoned at its source and so poisoned in all its waters, like a tree whose roots run deep and far into the surrounding soil, like a war whose devastating and impoverishing effects make their way into every remotest village and country road, sin has penetrated human life and affected human nature not superficially, not temporarily, but deeply, seriously and with grave consequences. To deal with sin you must deal with its foulness, with its degradation, with its scars and with its stains; farther you must deal with its regnancy and power—its bent and twist of habit, taste and inclination; and farther still you must deal with its guilt and the penalty which guilt involves and threatens to inflict. In the complexity and penetrating power of its results sin is not easily dealt with, but if symbols have any language then Christ's sitting at God's right hand attests that His redemptive sacrifice thoroughly and completely dealt with sin. For long generations the holy priesthood of Israel dealt with sin, dealing with it in an elaborate and beautifully suggestive and expressive ritualistic service. But this was an ineffective ministry and through generation after generation of human sin and guilt they "stood"—mark the attitude—"daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices which could never take away sins; but this man after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God." What a contrast and how significant is the contrast in the language of symbols between the Seated Christ and the standing priests! Rest assured our Christ would not have sat down, He would have been standing yet, still laboring and pouring out His soul unto death if His work had not been finished. Through all His life when as yet His sacrificial ministry was incomplete He rested not nor tarried; but when He ascended by Calvary's bloody steps and the rocky tomb to the right hand of the Father's side He sat down and in Christ, ascended and seated, humanity has evidence that our Lord gave of His strength and spent His life to the effectual putting away of sin.

Then along with the completeness, the position and attitude of Christ—seated at the right hand of power—attest the sufficiency of his sacrifice. Why was there a

sacrifice, what was its need and its purpose? What was the motive of our Saviour's cross? Was that death on Calvary solely for its moral effect, for the sake of the love which it would reveal and which in turn it would awaken? So we are sometimes told. But when we turn to the Scriptures I for one find it impossible not to feel that the necessity of an atonement springs from the eternal righteousness of God, so that all sacrifice for sin to be sufficient must relate itself to God and satisfy his holiness. Not for a moment would I deny the human necessity in the heart and in the conscience—of an atonement, nor overlook the response of our natures to the appeal of the cross. Without doubt in any sufficient atonement there will be elements that will meet the need of the human heart and satisfy the conscience of the guilty. But along with these human elements there must be elements that will relate themselves to God and satisfy the eternal righteousness of God. God, in his eternal righteousness, God in his essential holiness, God makes atonement necessary and any atonement which does not satisfy his righteousness is insufficient no matter how satisfying it might be to human nature.

How then do we know Christ's sacrifice to be sufficient and acceptable to God? By an experience, which, thank God, can never become absolute or antiquated we know the effectiveness of Calvary's appeal to our emotional nature and the power of the cross to satisfy and still the restless, agitated conscience. But how do we know the cross to be sufficient, to be acceptable to God? By the Resurrection and Ascension. The vacated tomb and the occupied throne. See where the disciples one and all saw their ascended Lord—at the right hand of God. From the throne to the manger, from the manger to the Cross, from the Cross to the throne and Christ enthroned and crowned at God's own hand is a divine attestation of God's pleasure in and acceptance of our Lord's propitiatory death. Who is he that ascended but he also that descended, and the ascension demonstrates the worth of the descension—of Bethlehem's condensation and Calvary's descent. The Cross anticipated the throne, the throne argues for the Cross, Christ crucified has become Christ crowned, and Christ's coronation is a divinely given attestation of the adequacy and of the acceptance of the mediatorial ministry of Christ crucified.

Likewise the position and attitude of Christ—seated at God's right hand—attest the perpetuity of Christ's sacrifice. Out of the Ascension grows the intercession and the intercession gives perpetuity to Christ's sacrifice. Indeed the intercession is the perpetuation of Christ's sacrifice. Do not picture Christ the Intercessor as a kneeling figure beseeching God for us. Rise to think of him as carrying out in glory the work of redemption the foundations of which were laid in Calvary. On the throne of God Christ continues the ministry of the cross, the intercession being a continuation of the Atonement, the pleading of the merits of his blood. The priestly atonement of Christ on Calvary, no doubt, was final, but it was final in the sense of working incessantly on, not only in its echoes and results with us, but in the self-sustained energies of his own Almighty and Immortal Spirit. He ever liveth to make intercession and his eternal intercession repeats, as it were, that tremendous sacrifice on Calvary and makes effective for every successive generation the energy of his immortal death. You can never relegate the cross to the past or make it a mere historical event. The cross is permanent and perpetual. The Cross lives in the intercession; the intercession is the prolongation of the Cross. As our Intercessor, the Son of God is our High Priest; and as the high-priest entered into the ancient sanctuary with the blood in his hands so Christ by His intercession repeats, as it were, the shedding of his blood and saves the Atonement from becoming a mere event in time by prolonging it through a timeless eternity. How blasphemous then is the sacerdotal idea! How blasphemous, for what is the lift up of the host and what are all sacerdotal ritualistic performances but a denial of the perpetuity of Christ's sacrifice, an ignoring of his ceaseless intercession. What the cross of Christ calls for from us is not embellishment or supplementing or addition but acceptance; for he who died upon the cross now sits upon the throne clothed in his priestly crimson robes, and by his intercession or prolongation of the atonement there, renders forever unnecessary any repetition of that sacrifice by us. First of all then the position and attitude of Christ—seated at God's right hand—argue for and attest the completeness, sufficiency and perpetuity of Christ's sacrifice.

II. In the second place this Scripture is a revelation as well as an argument concerning the Seated Christ.

There is first a revelation of this calm repose—Christ is seated—an expressive symbolic method of representing his enjoyment of the Eternal Rest of God. With his earthly ministry completed and man's redemption accomplished our Lord has entered into the calm tranquility of his Sabbath rest. On the seventh day when the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them, God rested and like the hallowed calm of the Eternal God is the calm repose of the Seated Christ.

One should beware, however, of interpreting the repose of Christ as the repose of vacuity, of inactivity, of indifference to the affairs of men. Away in the Egyptian deserts carved out of the eternal mountains, in colossal calm sit two giant figures, their hands lying on their laps and their large eyes wide open. They have sat thus through millenniums the embodiment of majestic calm. But that is the repose of inactivity and emptiness, while ceaseless, tireless, timeless activity is the very essence of the undisturbed tranquility of the Seated Christ. With the muttering, murderous multitude about him, the dying Stephen looked up through the vaulted roof and saw the heavens opened and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Jesus, as it were, had sprang to his feet in answer to the dying martyr's faith and prayer, and granted him a vision of his Lord at the seat of power. There you have the attitude of activity, of eager, tender, loving solicitude. When Stephen was standing in the midst of his tormenters, Jesus was also standing, watching, interested, his heart full of concern for his suffering disciple. What a precious picture that! In Nothing escapes the ascended Lord, nothing which is of interest to us is foreign to him, wherever our welfare is at issue there his activity and his loving solicitude centre. Apparently contradictory, but only apparently so, the Seated Christ is also the Standing Christ, an unresting

activity being the essence of our Lord's repose and so ministering unto rather than preventing his participation in our human affairs. As God rested after Creation's far away week and yet has been working ever since, so the Seated Christ while in the enjoyment of a repose parallel with the eternal calm of God is ever active for his people with ageless energy and might.

But while the repose of Christ does not mean the absence of activity and a heart at home with human life, it does mean the absence of any feeling akin to human fearfulness and fretting. With all the intensity of his interest in earthly affairs and though he hopes for the coronation of righteousness with a passion as deep as Bethlehem, Gethsemane and Calvary, nothing in earth's moral conflict, neither the determined character of sin's warfare, nor the reverses and apparent losses to the Kingdom of God, disturb his majestic calm. In his life and death Christ gave himself to the world so that every seething centre of sin, sorrow and struggle finds Jesus in the midst; yet withal his interest never passes into anxiety to fill him with dismay or break the calm serenity of his rest. Sometimes the report of a committee on statistics or the nasal whine of a bilious brother is sufficient to fill us with alarm! But though Jesus Christ has given his all to the triumph of his kingdom and staked everything upon the issue, be the struggle ever so severe, seem the outcome ever so uncertain, he rises not, in his strength and confidence, from his throne's tranquillity. Recall if you will the second Psalm where the poetic mind of a Hebrew poet laid hold upon by the thought of our Lord's repose uses the skill of his art generally to contrast the wild unrest and confusion of earth with the tranquil throne of our Lord.

"Why do the nations rage,  
And the peoples imagine a vain thing?  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
And the rulers take counsel together,  
Against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying,  
Let us break their bands asunder,  
And cast away their cords from us."

Then over against that scene of wild array and confusion he sets one of absolute calm. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh." The first scene is in earth, the second is in heaven. The lower half of the picture is all eager motion and strained effort; the upper is full of the peace of God and its eternal repose. "Hot with hatred, flushed with defiance, and busy with their plots the rebels hurry together like swarming ants on their hillocks;" they did it in the days of the Psalmist, they do it now, but undisturbed by the rumbling thunders of evil and undisturbed by the disturbances of earth, the Seated Son of God rises not, nor breaks his calm repose.

Never think of humanity as having no interest for God. Nowhere in the Bible is man a trivial creature whose doings signify nothing; on the contrary they always move God, they may please or delight him, or they may stir his holy wrath, but they always have some significance and create an effect. Yet while his solicitude for the sons of men is as deep as the depths of his passion it never gives place to fearfulness or fretting, but maintains a quiet heart that should teach every disciple the art of tranquillity and remind us not to tremble too much for the ark of God or take the flouting boasts of iniquity too seriously.

Then along with his repose this Scripture reveals the regnancy of Jesus. The risen and ascended Jesus sits at the right hand of God, and in the suggestive symbolism of Hebrew thought the right hand of God is expressive of Lordship with its sovereignty and strength. In his Ascension our Lord became the Lord of lords and his Lordship is no empty complimentary title but the fulfilment of his own audacious prophecy, "Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God." In the last speech Lord Beaconsfield delivered in the House of Lords he replied to the argument that it was necessary to garrison heavily the frontiers of British India by saying, "The key of India is not Calcutta or Herat or Kandahar—the key of India is London." So the key of the kingdom of God, the key of the movements and forces of life, the key of human history is in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. To the worldly mind all history moves along certain lines full of sadness and disease. History—what is it! What is it but a record of bloody battles in the Bay of Syracuse, of infamous tyrannies on the banks of the Tiber, of inquisitions, national decay and hardly won legislation, every movement onward being a movement that leaves behind it the whitened bones of those who must suffer if man advances. So the world reads history and so would we if it were not for a clear vision of the Ascended Christ whose wounded hands now sway the sceptre of affairs. You cannot divorce human history and Jesus Christ. They are inseparably one; history is his story so that a true interpreting of history is a telling of his story and a true telling of his story furnishes a key that gives meaning and order to the historical movement of events. History and Jesus Christ, I say, are one. They were one in the age of prophet and priest, where the glory of his presence gladdens many a tremulous page of tragic events as the angel of the Lord. They were one in the days of the Incarnation when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, so that all the movements and forces of life look either forward or backward to those days as all history is dated from his birth. And that union still abides; the living Christ being the Christ of history, the Christ who is making history and whose hands administer the world. I said the disciples did not think of Jesus as the Christ of history. Neither did they in a sense. Yet in a sense grand and full of meaning they did. For while they did not think of Him as the Christ of history in the sense of His being a mere historical person, they never thought of Him as other than the Christ of history in the sense of His being the living Christ, standing behind all the movements and forces of life, Himself the centre and circumference of history. In the toll and turmoil of life they heard the foot fall of their Master, with regnant power and glory they saw his form and recognized His presence in the onward march of the affairs of men and understood, as we should understand, that the Lordship of Jesus meant His Sovereignty in human life. Be not mistaken. Our Lord did not initiate a movement and then abandon it. Since the cloud received Him out of the sight of the first disciples He has been administering the affairs of the world and while we do not make too much of the Cross we should make more of the Throne and gird ourselves with the inspiration of believing that