

SOUTHERN
PRESBYTERIAN PULPIT:

A COLLECTION OF SERMONS

BY

MINISTERS OF THE SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH.

Richmond, Va.:
THE PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION.



COPYRIGHTED BY
JAMES K. HAZEN, *Secretary of Publication,*
1896.

PRINTED BY
WHITTET & SHEPPERSON,
RICHMOND, VA.



JESUS' SUPREME AUTHORITY.

BY REV. C. R. HEMPHILL, D. D.,

Pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church, Louisville, Ky.

“Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.”—JOHN xiii. 13.

JESUS and the twelve were assembled in the upper room of some unknown host in Jerusalem to celebrate the passover. It was the same night in which he was betrayed, and while they were gathered about the table Jesus arose and laid aside his garments; took a towel and girded himself; poured water into a basin, and washed his disciples' feet. He takes his garments and sits down again, and says to his disciples, “Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.” Is he mistaken who finds here an acted parable of the incarnation? The Son of God had abandoned his throne in heaven; had laid aside the glory of his divinity; had girded himself with the nature of man, and set himself to the lowly service of cleansing and saving men. In a little while he is to return to the heaven whence he came, and to robe himself with the glory which he had with the Father before the world was. The Son of man is the Son of God. He that is among men as he that serveth is also over men as he that ruleth. “Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.” These titles by which you address me, says Jesus, are no mere conventionalities of speech; in their broadest import they are true.

Master means teacher, Lord means owner or ruler; fusing these ideas together, the authority of teacher over pupil, of master over servant, of ruler over subject, we arrive at the conception of supreme and absolute authority. The humble figure that a few moments ago was discharging so menial an office now assumes to himself a dignity and an authority none other of the sons of men have ever ventured to claim. To vindicate the right of Jesus to the supremacy he claims does not fall within my purpose. I set before me the humbler task of defining his authority in its nature and extent.

Many of his most familiar sayings carry with them the strongest assertion of his authority, and serve to display its nature. Here are some of them: "Ye believe in God, believe also in me"; "I am the Bread of Life"; "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink"; "I am the Light of the world"; "Thy sins are forgiven thee"; "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels"; "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God"; "The Father hath given him authority to execute judgment." When one speaks in this fashion it is natural for him to add, "For one is your Master, even Christ." To reach a more adequate notion of the authority with which Jesus invests himself, let us dwell on some of his utterances. "I am the Way," he declares. Many are the roads, made smooth by the tread of many feet, over which men have travelled to find God. These paths end in darkness. Jesus is clothed with the authority to lead men into the knowledge of God, and to bring them into his presence; he is himself the way. "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

"I am the good Shepherd." The mark of the shepherd is authority, wielded, it is true, with sympathy and

tenderness, but authority still. The flock must follow the steps of the shepherd, and yield to his guidance and control. Jesus is the good Shepherd, the only true Shepherd of the sheep; all others are thieves and robbers. At the head of the flock walks Jesus, and only those who hear his voice and follow him will reach the shelter of the heavenly fold.

"I am the Truth," Jesus affirms. Amid the babel of human tongues, crying, "lo! here, lo! there," is heard this saying of Jesus, so quietly spoken that we may fail to hear it or to compass its meaning. The old fable is that truth once existed in the beauty and unity of complete proportions, but was torn into fragments and the fragments scattered to the winds. Men have been haunted by the vision of truth's pristine unity, and, cherishing the dream of its restoration, have been patiently seeking the severed parts. Jesus declares man's dream fulfilled. The sovereignty of truth is imperial, her voice is imperative to the minds of men, the voice, indeed, of God. This sovereign authority of truth Jesus takes to himself. The august functions of the Judge of all the earth are among the prerogatives of Jesus. He pictures the solemn scenes of final judgment, and paints himself the central figure. Before his throne are gathered all nations; in his hands is lodged the destiny of every man; and from his presence march the long files of the generations of men to their everlasting abodes.

Observe how the acts of Jesus illustrate and lend force to his words. The winds and the waves are untamed by man, and are the very symbols of immeasurable power. See Jesus amid the storm. He rises in the little ship tossing on the billows, rebukes the wind and it hushes to silence; says to the waves, "Peace, be still,"

and there is a great calm. "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Death is the last and mightiest enemy of man. In his fear man pictures death with crown and sceptre. See Jesus confronting those whose lips are now sealed and whose beating hearts are stilled. "Little girl, I say unto thee, arise." "Lazarus, come forth." The dead hear this voice of authority and power. Jesus smites the sceptre from death and flings his crown into the dust.

See Jesus face to face with the alien powers of hell which have invaded the inner life of man. He meets a man whose home was the tombs, whom no man could bind, no, not with chains; who was possessed of a legion of demons. At his word the demons tremble and flee; peace falls on the troubled spirit of the fierce demoniac, and he sits at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind. The regnant spirit of Jesus betrays itself in his whole tone and attitude. It compasses him as an atmosphere. Compare him with the religious teachers of his time. They were men of learning and of prestige among the people. Venerable precedent and hoary tradition were the sanction of their teachings. The method of Jesus was altogether different. He uttered himself; he was a voice and not an echo. People were quick to detect the contrast, and to catch the tone of this new teacher. "The multitudes were astonished at his teaching: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." This accent of authority is felt in passing from the prophets to Jesus. "Thus saith the Lord," is the formula of the prophet: "Verily, verily, I say unto you," is the formula of Jesus. Prophecy itself confesses his superiority. In John the Baptist Old Testament prophecy comes to its flower and con-

summation, and in him does homage to Jesus and veils its face before his brighter glory.

The bearing and tone of Jesus unite with his words and deeds to impress on us the authority, altogether singular and supreme, to which he lays claim. We no longer wonder that Jesus fails to rebuke Nathaniel, who calls him the Son of God; commends Peter, who confesses him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God; and shrinks not from the worship of Thomas, who hails him, my Lord and my God! "Ye call me Master and Lord; and ye say well; for so I am."

Authority may be absolute in nature, yet may be limited in range. Has Jesus traced limits within which he is to be supreme, and beyond which he is to be as other men? We discover none. His authority is coëxtensive with the faculties and acts and relations of man. The Lord Jesus is not a sovereign who commands obedience in certain spheres only; he is supreme over the whole man. He is the Lord of the reason. He comes within the realm of the intelligence, and requires subjection to himself. He is to be "the master-light of all our seeing." The truths he utters are fixed points from which thought is to travel, and to which it is to return. The findings of the reason are to be construed in relation to his teachings, and corrected by them. He does not argue, he declares. "Verily, verily, I say unto you," is reason enough for our reason.

Jesus is Lord of the affections. Our love we regard as peculiarly our own, and a stranger may not intermeddle with our affections; we will give or withhold, as we may choose. But Jesus prefers the highest claim upon our love. Even as his brothers' sheaves bowed before the sheaf of Joseph, so the affections that we cherish for father, mother, wife, children, must yield to the affec-

tion we give to him. The very centre is to be shifted, and the movement of life must revolve about him.

Jesus is the Lord of the conscience. It is a commonplace of our thinking that freedom of conscience is the inalienable right and the proper heritage of man; yet with a great sum of tears and blood have we obtained it. This holy of holies of man's nature, within which king nor priest may come, Jesus claims the right to enter. The voice of conscience is to be the echo of his voice, its decisions to be guided by his judgments, and to be registered for final appeal at his bar.

Jesus is Lord of the will. Through this executive power man translates thought and motive and purpose into action, and expresses himself. Here, too, Jesus asserts supremacy. This mysterious and masterful faculty of man must guide its movement by Christ's will.

“Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Our wills are ours, we know not how,
Our wills are ours, to make them thine.”

With claims so lofty, and covering the amplitude of man's nature, the marvel is that Jesus is not pelted from the world. We remember that for his pretensions the Jews more than once took up stones to stone him. A Socrates, or a Confucius, or a Paul, who would arrogate to himself claims like these, would be despised for his folly. There is something in man that restrains him from hastily resenting the claims of Jesus—an instinctive recognition, it may be, of the right of Jesus to be Master and Lord.

Not that the authority of Jesus passes without challenge. In unfolding the nature and extent of the claims Jesus makes upon the allegiance of men, I have had in mind some contrary teachings of our time. This comes not only from the avowed opponents of Christ. Some

of those who count themselves his loyal disciples deny him knowledge, and, therefore, authority, in some regions where modern scholarship is most busy. It is said, for instance, that in regard to the history of Israel and the origin of Israel's sacred books Jesus had no knowledge, or, at any rate, delivered no authoritative teaching. Expressions of his which seem to indicate definite opinions and instruction must be interpreted by the doctrine of his self-emptying, or by the principle of accommodation to the beliefs or the modes of expression common to his day. Great caution must be observed in ascertaining what Jesus believed and taught, but he is on perilous ground who adjourns his faith in any teaching of Jesus, however incidental, to the results of even the highest scholarship. The disciples of Pythagoras confided in him so implicitly that to quote a saying of his was to them an end of all controversy. "*Ipse dixit*—he says it," was their very badge of discipleship. "Verily, I say unto you," falling from the lips of Jesus, should be to the Christian a bar to all further discussion.

Whatever posture Jesus assumed towards the Holy Scriptures, loyalty to him requires should be ours. Whatever he believed and taught regarding the providential movement of the history of Israel, and the origin and character and veracity and inspiration of the then sacred books, this we should not hesitate to accept, though all the critics and scholars of the world should be arrayed against us. *Ipse dixit*—he said it.

We do well to read again words long ago written of Jesus :

"Why do the heathen rage,
And the people 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.
He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh.
Yet have I set my King
Upon my holy hill of Zion."

Let me hasten to add, that subjection to Jesus is the truest freedom. Some may be tempted to think, "Well, this must be a hard Master, the claims he makes are so strenuous and extravagant; it must be a bitter experience to be in his service." Far from it. His yoke is easy and his burden is light; and the liberty wherewith Christ makes free is the broadest and happiest. See what subjection to him does for men. He takes a few fishermen and publicans, slaves to ignorance and prejudice, and by their obedience to him he lifts them to a place among the leaders of human thought for all ages, and sets them as shining examples for all time. Saul, the narrow-minded and bigoted Pharisee, becomes the "bond-servant of Jesus Christ," and is thereby transformed into the most illustrious exponent and champion of freedom of thought the world has seen. His unfettered intellect expands under the great ideas of Jesus, and his mind gives birth to "thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars." It is the thought of Paul that has brought freedom to the world. He is the universal thinker; for depth and reach and influence on men and institutions no philosopher or statesman compares with him.

But what is the effect upon character? Is not submission to the will of another deadly to aspiration and growth and true virtue? To be subject to the Lord Jesus is to win the beauty of holiness. Fishermen and publicans, under this influence, become the saintliest spirits of mankind. A Saul becomes a Paul. It was Paul's delight to think the thoughts of Jesus Christ after

him ; to guide his conscience by the judgments of Jesus ; to pour upon him his great heart's wealth of affection ; and to bow his imperial will to the will of the Lord Jesus. The traces of suffering upon his body he counted as brands by which Jesus Christ had marked him as his own. Yet where shall we look upon a character so splendid? Under the benign influence of the lordship of Christ every Christian grace ripened to a surpassing beauty. For perfection of character, only one name do we write above the name of Paul—the name that is above every name.

Loyalty to Jesus Christ is the need of the hour. For intellectual rest, for peace of heart, for guidance in duty, for enrichment of character, for motive and inspiration in the service of man, for bringing in the kingdom of God, the Christian must, with emphasis and deep devotion, salute Jesus as his Master and Lord.

Before the toiling, sinning, suffering men of our day stands Jesus, as of old, and in the tenderness of love he invites them to the rest and peace of bearing his yoke.

“ Oh ! may our willing hearts confess
Thy sweet, thy gentle sway ;
Glad captives of thy matchless grace,
Thy righteous rule obey ! ”