

Ps 114:1,2
Hy 1B
Ps 110:1,2,3
Ps 2:3,4
Hy 31:4,5
Genesis 18:16-33
Revelation 5
Lord's Day 19.50,51

Yarrow, April 18, 2010

Beloved Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Canada is not Sodom or Gomorrah. That reality, however, does not take away from the fact that there is so very much in Canada that offends the living and holy Creator of heaven and earth. What happens in so many bedrooms and hotel rooms of the nation simply does not please the Lord – and I'm referring to fornication as well as homosexual activity legally sanctioned in our land. We can add to that the legal murder of some 100,000 unborn infants in our land every year. And that's to say nothing of the service of gods other than the Lord. God said when He created human life that the wages of sin was death (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23). One should expect, then, that the same sort of destruction that fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah should fall upon Canada. God, after all, does not change.

That raises the pressing question: why does the Lord God let Canada continue to exist? Why are *you* still here? For that matter: why did the Lord allow the first Canadian Reformed Church to be instituted 60 years ago this past week (Coaldale, on April 16, 1950)? It's of the answers to such questions that the church makes confession in Lord's Day 19.

I summarise the sermon this afternoon with this theme:

THE ASCENDED CHRIST IS SOVEREIGN OVER CANADA.

1. The sovereignty of Christ Jesus,
2. The program of Christ Jesus,
3. The responsibility of Christ's people.

1. The Sovereignty of Jesus Christ

The Lord God in the beginning created the human race with the mandate to rule over God's world. That's Genesis 1: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (vs 26). And God did so.

Notice God's intent. Was there anything on earth that was not included the bits and pieces God wished to place under man's authority? The birds are included, the fish, the livestock, the reptiles, indeed "all the earth". Hence David's grateful song of praise: "You made [man] ruler over the works of Your hands; You put everything under his feet" (Ps 8:6). "Everything under his feet": that's all-encompassing! And that other phrase, "under his feet", is well-known to us too; the term catches the notion of sovereignty, of authority over. When the elders of Israel had to place their feet on the necks of the five Canaanite kings caught in the cave of Makkedah (that's Joshua 10), the symbolism of their action was clear to all concerned; these kings were thoroughly at the mercy of the Israelites, they'd been so completely defeated that the people of Israel were their lords. When David says in Ps 8 that God "put

everything under [man's] feet," David's point was very clear to his hearers; God created the human race to rule over all creation, with nothing exempt from man's control. Man received a place a little less than God indeed!

The fall into sin toppled man from his exalted place in God's creation. Instead of being ruler over all the earth, plants began to grow wherever they wished – weeds. Viruses invaded people's bodies so that they became ill. The creature exalted to be lord of the earth was humiliated to the point that he returned to the dust from whence he was taken.

God in His goodness sent His only Son into the world. In the power of His divine nature He exercised lordship over this fallen earth according to the intent of Genesis 1, for the Son of God bade the storm be still and it obeyed, He commanded the fish of the lake to assemble where the disciples were fishing and it was so, He instructed the demons to leave the possessed and they obliged Him, He even commanded the dead to arise and they arose. As per Genesis 1, He "rule[d] over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." More, on the cross of Calvary He battled the devil himself, he whom Jesus Himself had once called "the prince of this world" (John 12:31; 16:11), and He defeated him. That's Colossians 2: "having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (vs 15).

That being so, brothers and sisters, it's no surprise to hear Jesus speak those wonderful words to His disciples before His ascension: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt 28:18). "All authority ... on earth": this is Genesis 1 fulfilled! Here's a man who indeed ruled over "all the earth", including the birds and the fish and the livestock, including even the wind and the demons! But whereas the man of Genesis 1 received authority only over the earth God had created (see Ps 115:16), the man of Good Friday and Easter received authority also in heaven. That's what He told His disciples: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me." So, when He ascended into heaven, He received from God that place of honour at His right hand, and every creature in all creation was placed under His feet. Ephesians 1: God "seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way" (vss 20ff). "Rule and authority, power and dominion": those phrases refer to kings of the earth and kings of the air, devils and demons. But they're all stretched out on the ground beneath the feet of the exalted King of kings; He's indeed the Lord of the lords of the earth.

This is the glorious picture of Revelation 5. John, that disciple of Jesus Christ who played such a foundational role in the building of the church in Jerusalem and elsewhere, was imprisoned on the island of Patmos in a rage of official persecution against the young church. In his powerlessness he was granted the privilege to look into heaven itself (Rev 4) – and saw there a throne with a glorious Being on the throne, God Almighty. The vision continued in chap 5, with the God on the throne holding out a scroll in His right hand – but none in all creation was in a position to take that scroll and open it. What the content of the scroll was?? Written in this scroll was God's plan for this earth, all that should happen for its salvation. Recall, God had determined from of old all that was to be (cf Ps 139:16; Ephesians 1:4f). But make His plan *happen* God wished to give to another.... Who could do it? Who could overcome the resistance of the fallen creature God had once fashioned to rule over the fish and the birds and the livestock and all the earth? Who could overcome the "prince of this world", the authority and influence of demons and devils?? None there was, none..., until the Lamb came forward, He who had been slain on Good Friday but arose on Easter Sunday, He who six weeks later had

ascended into the courts of God. In agreement with the precept of Genesis 1, “all authority” was given to Him, not just on earth where God’s redemptive plan was to be carried out, but all authority was given Him in heaven also – in the Command Centre of God’s big world. So He came forward, took the scroll, opened its seals, *and caused the plan of God as contained in that scroll to come to pass*. No wonder the angels and creatures of heaven burst forth into songs of praise: “To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!” (5:13). So the dignity and honour the Lord God intended for the creature man back in Genesis 1 is restored; He who controls and determines all history today is a man of like flesh and blood as you and me! It makes one excited, thankful; in Jesus Christ a *man* again rules over God’s wide world! How delightful the Lord’s redeeming and restoring work!

A consequence obviously follows. The true north strong and free exists by the will of and under the authority of the very One who died for your sins on Good Friday; Christ Jesus is today King of Canada. President Obama is not the ultimate sovereign over the United States, nor is the United States the ultimate power in this world; the President and his land are servants under the control of the King of kings, your Saviour Jesus Christ. Events as they unfold in the Middle East and even in the Vatican do not happen ‘by themselves’ and certainly don’t happen either by the will of men, but are securely in the hands of Him to whom the Father has given the scroll of history. As a result, God’s plan for Canada is unfolding according to the divine script in Jesus’ hand, and God’s plan for the United States is also unfolding according to the details God has recorded in that same divine script in Jesus’ hand. And so it is for the entire world!

This reality gives enormous comfort and encouragement for the people of God. Things happen in our land and around the world that strike us as distinctly unhealthy for the coming of the kingdom of God and the well-being of God’s people. But the Scriptures are clear: there is not a force in all creation able to separate us from the love of God. More, all things of necessity must work for the good of God’s people. After all, if Christ loved us so much that He would lay down His life for us, shall He now not preserve His own in the face of whatever devilish attack there might be?? The church gives its answer to that question in the glorious confession of our Lord's Day: “by His power He defends and preserves us against all enemies” (Lord's Day 19.51b).

But that gospel also raises hard questions. If Christ is sovereign, why does He allow so much evil to happen in our land? If Canada is really no better than Sodom or Gomorrah, why has He not destroyed our nation?? That brings us to our second point:

2. The Program of Jesus Christ.

By what policy does the Lord of lords govern the world? Does He rule at random in response to changed circumstance as He discovers them each day? Or does He in fact govern pro-actively, with a specific goal and purpose in mind??

The latter is, of course, the case. Being the exalted King that He is, He does not simply *re-act* to the things that happen in His dominion. All things are so much in His control that all He does is *pro-act*ive, is in fact determined by His overall policy and purpose. He Himself has told us what that policy and purpose is in the prayer He prayed just before He went to the cross. He said, “Father, the time has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify you. For You granted Him authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those You have given Him” (John 17:1f). There it is: You granted Him authority over all people *so that He might give eternal life to all those You gave Him*. The point here is that the human population is divided into two parts, those sinners to whom God has shown mercy and so chosen to eternal life *and* those sinners whom God has passed by and so left in the lost condition

as slaves to Satan. But those whom the Father has chosen to eternal life do not receive eternal life willy-nilly. Rather, the Lord God has given these elect persons to the Son so that He might do the work that is necessary to bring them to glory.

What that work is that the Son needs to do? The Son needed to atone for their sins on the cross, rescue them from Satan's bondage, and restore them to God's side in the great struggle of the antithesis. But once His work was finished on the cross, Jesus Christ did not have the elect of God in heaven yet; despite His victory God's people still lived in the tears and troubles of this broken life. Now that Christ ascended into heaven, and God gave Him that throne of glory at His right hand as King of kings, Jesus Christ is in a position to pull the strings that need to be pulled in order to get His own to glory. So He rules the world in such a way that all those whom the Father has given Him in fact *get* to glory. In that passage I quoted earlier from Ephesians 1, the Scripture says that "God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything *for the church*" (vss 22). That's the point: He governs in such a way as to benefit His church, and that's to say that He rules for the express purpose of bringing His people to glory.

If that, then, is Christ's over-arching policy, how does He achieve this plan? Observe with me, congregation, what Jesus Christ does in the book of Acts. By the ordinance of God sinners need faith in order to be saved (John 3:16). Faith in turn comes through the preaching of the gospel (Romans 10:14,17). That preaching needs to happen in the language of the hearer, in such a way that it strikes a chord in the context of his own culture. Throughout the Mediterranean basin in Jesus' own time were thousands of people whom the Father had chosen to eternal life, some in Corinth, some in Rome, some in Philippi, some in outlying towns and villages. These people, we need to know, came from any tribe and language, any culture and religious background available in the Mediterranean world – and there were many. How shall the ascended Christ ensure that these chosen of God hear the gospel and come to faith?

The answer? On the day of Pentecost, beloved, the ascended Christ ensured that in the city of Jerusalem were "Parthians and Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt," etc, all present to witness the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and hear Peter's proclamation of the gospel. How the ascended Christ got them from their homes far off into the city of Jerusalem? Why, He sovereignly ensured that the custom grew that Jews once scattered around the world would assemble in Jerusalem precisely at the time when He would have the Holy Spirit poured out. Then He caused the apostle Peter to preach the gospel of Christ's triumph on the cross and exaltation into heaven – and caused the people to understand the apostle in their own native language. As a result, some 3000 persons were baptized on that very day. Do you get the picture? So sovereign is He that He used the religious calendar of the time to ensure that specific persons whom the Father had given to the Son were in fact present in Jerusalem when He wanted them there.

Consider a second example. On a particular day Jesus Christ from heaven on high arrested the zealous Jew Saul as he travelled to Damascus. Christ Jesus caught him by the scruff of his neck and declared that Saul-the-persecutor would be His "chosen instrument" to bring Christ's name "before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Who Saul was? He was an exceedingly well educated man, trained at PhD level in Old Testament studies in the school of Gamaliel. More, this Saul –later known as Paul– was raised in Tarsus of Cilicia and so was wise in the ways of the world of his time; he was even a Roman citizen and fluent in the common language of the Roman Empire (which was Greek). Further, the exalted Christ ensured that there was a period of peace throughout the Roman Empire and a good system of roads as well as commerce. As a result, Paul as

Christ's apostle could travel freely wherever he wished and could speak in a language people throughout the empire could understand – and speak it at their level too. What we have?? Christ Jesus as King over God's world organized the political and social circumstances of the time in such a way as to promote the spread of the gospel – so that in turn all the chosen of God who lived at that time throughout the Roman Empire would hear the gospel and so come to faith. Political and social and economic circumstances are not enemies of the church; rather, politicians and governors, bankers and teachers, society's movers and shakers are *so many tools in the King's hands to bring about the salvation of His elect*. Your Saviour is sovereign in today's world to such an extent that no newspaper is put to together and no news footage prepared for TV with the will and permission of King Jesus. More, it is He who lets Hollywood crank out what Hollywood cranks out, and it is He who appoints Ministers of Education who promote God-less education in the land, and it is He who determines the rulings of the Judges of Canada's Supreme Court and the decisions of Canada's Human Rights Commissions. Yet none of it is meaningless or random; all serves the singular purpose of bringing to salvation all those whom the Father has given to the Son. Exactly how Hollywood's stuff serves to the salvation of the elect I do not know, and I don't understand either how the decisions of Human Rights Commissions serves Christ's overall purpose. But then again, I don't have to have answers to every question; it is enough that I *believe* that Jesus Christ is sovereign in today's world. And He knows perfectly what He is doing... – also in our land of growing immorality and lawlessness. Yes, even the legalization of same-sex marriage and the government's refusal to do anything about the deaths of 100,000 babies a year may not destroy my confidence in Jesus' sovereignty; somehow, somehow these evils serve His greater purpose of bringing to glory all those Canadians whom the Father has given to the Son.

Canada is not Sodom. But so much happens in Toronto and in Vancouver, in Chilliwack and in Corner Brook that provokes the Lord's anger as much as Sodom did. Yet our country and its cities and towns is not destroyed as Sodom was because there are elect of God in our land, people whom the Father has given to the Son – and they have not yet come to faith or received their redemption. For our land will continue, and indeed the whole world will continue, until all whom the Father has ordained to eternal life have come to their redemption through the sovereign leading of the King of kings. As long as the nation exists, Canada remains the Lord's land.

We come to our last point:

3. The Responsibility of Christ's people

Christ alone, of course, is King of kings. His position as lord over all the earth, however, is the very position God intended all people to have; mankind was to rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth (Genesis 1:26). Now that we are delivered from Satan's bondage and restored to God, how are we to understand our position in the Saviour's big world? To put the question differently: what responsibility do we have in Canada? What role do God's people play in the nation?

We can answer that question in terms of our task to witness to the kingship of Jesus Christ in Canada, and so be responsible kings ourselves over that which the Lord has entrusted to our individual care. That's all fine, but we do well to see the picture in a bigger way.

After the Lord God announced His intent to check out the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham was bold to intercede with God for the cities' future. "Will you really sweep [the city] away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it?" (Genesis 18:24). The Lord's answer was categorical: "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake" (vs 26). We read how the conversation went; God would not destroy the city if there

were 45 righteous in it, or 40, or 30, or 20 or even 10... I have no idea how big these two cities were, but it's surely clear that 40 or 30 or 20 or even 10 righteous people is a tiny, tiny minority of the entire population. Yet the Lord God would spare these two cities for the sake of such a small godly remnant! And the destruction God intended on the city did not ultimately happen until Lot, "a righteous man" (2 Peter 2:7) was safely away together with his family.

What's the implication, beloved? Is it not that the city continued to exist *because there was a righteous man within its population*? But is that not exactly the point in relation to Canada today? Why did the Lord not destroy the world immediately after Jesus' victory on the cross and His ascension into heaven? He's Lord of lords and Satan is defeated – why not clean the earth immediately of all evil doers and the devil behind them? Yet the Lord didn't do so *because there are righteous people on the earth*. That is to say: there are on Planet Earth sinners whom the Father has given to the Son, sinners for whom the Son has died, sinners whom the Son has already brought to faith or still needs to bring to faith. *For the sake of these righteous people* Jesus Christ keeps the world going – and He will not destroy the world until every last chosen person has come to faith and can inherit life eternal.

Make no mistake, beloved: Canada continues to exist for the sake of the Lord's church gathering work! Put it differently: Canada is not yet destroyed – though so many of its sins overlap the transgressions of Sodom and Gomorrah – because there are people in the land whom the Lord God sees as righteous. Canada exists for the sake of the church!

What enormous privilege there is that reality, and what enormous responsibility! Privilege because the godly of Canada are the reason for the nation's continued existence. It's not the wisdom of the Prime Minister that keeps the nation going, nor is it the astute mind of the Governor of the Bank of Canada. But your Saviour keeps the nation together because He has elect people in the land and He would bring them to glory – and that includes you and me, and perhaps the children that will come after us. But what responsibility follows then too! If the Christians of the land would become like the unbelieving population of the land, what would that do to Canada's future? How would God's blessing remain on the land if there were no righteous people in Canada? What, then, is the best thing you can do for your country? Get a good education? Build up a good business? Enter community politics? Ah sure, these things can all be noble goals in themselves. But the best thing you can for your land is live close to the Lord, be *righteous* in His eyes through Jesus Christ. What the nation needs is parents who bring up their children to know and respect the King of Canada, Jesus Christ – that in turn there be a new generation of Canadians who are God-pleasing in the land. This land needs faithful Christians, and so a faithful church!

Why does Canada still exist? Why has the King of kings not destroyed the land on account of its sins? By the good grace of the Lord, there are elect of God in the land, and they must be brought to faith in the flow of time. To accomplish that goal the King of kings has established His church in this land. Now we, and indeed every Christian in Canada, has the glorious responsibility to live as persons redeemed by His blood, righteous in His eyes – and so a blessing to their neighbours. That's to say: we're to be kings with Christ in Canada.

And would you think that the King of kings who gave us this noble privilege wouldn't supply what we need to carry out that privilege?!