

"THE GOD MAN"

OFFICIAL FESTIVAL OF ARTS SERVICE
ADDRESS

by

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"Whatever is true,
whatever is honorable,
whatever is just,
whatever is pure,
whatever is lovely,
whatever is gracious,
if there is any excellence,
if there is anything worthy of praise,
think about these things."

Surely a Festival of Arts should cause us to think on things which are true.

All truth is of God. Therefore a dichotomy between the secular and sacred is intolerable. As God is the essential unity of all truth, the Christian cannot relegate the arts to the realms of the secular or the ordinary. That is why as a church we have endeavoured in some way over the years to be identified with the Adelaide Festival of Arts.

It was essential for Paul to remind the Philippian Christians to think on whatever is true. So much in the pagan society was false. The Stoic philosophers realized this and drew up their ethical lists of virtues and vices. So much in our society is neither true nor false, but a mixture of both. Unthinking people easily become confused. Never before in the history of mankind has news been so readily available through mass media. Yet at the Seminar arranged by the Department of Adult Education of the University of Adelaide for mass media personnel, a well-experienced executive said, "The frightening thought is that more people also may be misinformed, that they are wandering in a jungle of information with little chance of finding their way to the light of truth."

That is also true of some who are seeking spiritual truth. They may not be cynical like Pilate who, when confronted by Christ - the Way, the Truth and the Life - asked contemptuously, "What is truth?" They may honestly want to know the truth but have not given

priority to thinking it through.

Many in Adelaide will have a unique opportunity during the Festival of thinking about Jesus Christ. Is he son of man, or the Son of God, or both? Is he Superstar or Super Son? For 2,000 years this Babe of Bethlehem, this Teacher of Galilee, this Carpenter of Nazareth, this Worker of miracles, this Man of God, has caused people to think, to discuss, to reject or to follow.

Thomas Carlyle, the 19th century historian and philosopher, said, "Had this doctrine of the divinity of Christ been lost, Christianity would have vanished like a dream."

To investigate the evidence so as to establish who Jesus Christ is we need to begin with the documents available, such as the Four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Even if, at this stage, we view them simply as historical documents, and not necessarily the Word of God, there is substantial proof concerning their authenticity.

Professor F. F. Bruce has stated in his book, "Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?" that there are about 4,000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament in whole or in part. The best and most important of these go back to somewhere about A.D. 350, the two most important being the Codex Vaticanus in the Vatican Library in Rome, and the Codex Sinaiticus (purchased from the Soviet Government for £100,000 on Christmas Day, 1933) and at present in the British Museum. Let us compare the textual material for other historical works.

The History of Thucydides and the History of Herodotus have earliest manuscripts over 1,300 years later than the originals. Yet no classical scholar would seriously argue that the authenticity of these histories is in doubt.

How different is the situation of the New Testament. In addition to the two excellent manuscripts of the 4th Century, the earliest of some thousands known to us, considerable fragments remain of papyrus copies of books of the New Testament dated from

100 to 200 years earlier still.

Sir Frederick Kenyon said in 1940, "The interval between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be, in fact, negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established."

Based on the evidence in the Scripture, the Christian believes that Jesus was the only begotten Son of God. His relationship with God is unique. He is not a God in human disguise nor a mere man with divine qualities. The Christian believes Him to be God made man.

The Nicene Creed puts it this way: "Who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven; And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary; And was made man."

The Christian, therefore, believes that this historic Person possessed two distinct and perfect natures, Godhead and manhood.

Let us look in more detail at the evidence:

1. THE CLAIMS OF CHRIST.

Just as a good opal from Coober Pedy has several colours, each one contributing to the beauty and attractiveness of the complete stone, so Jesus Christ may be considered in various ways in answer to the question "Who is He?"

(1) He claimed to be the Messiah, as the fulfilment of Old Testament expectation. He assumed the title "Son of man", which was an accepted Messianic title derived originally from one of Daniel's visions. He accepted the title "Son of God" when challenged by the high priest (Mark 14:61,62), which was another Messianic title taken from Psalm 2:7. He claimed to fulfil the Jewish Law. He said, "I came not to destroy but to fulfil."

(2) He claimed to be the Redeemer of Mankind. He said, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost." "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." He implies a uniqueness of relationship to humanity.

(3) He claimed to be the Master of Mankind. He said He was Lord of the Sabbath. He gave the command "Follow Me". He stated, "He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me." "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." This remarkable claim to control lives and to be the supreme motive in life is surely more than human.

(4) He claimed to be the Judge of Mankind. Several of His parables imply that He will come back again at the end of the world. Moreover, the final day of reckoning will be postponed until His return. He will separate men from one another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Not only will Jesus be the Judge, but the criterion of judgment will be men's attitude to Him as revealed in their treatment of His 'brethren', His followers who do the will of God (Mark 3:25), or in their response to His Word (John 12:47, 48).

Imagine a minister addressing his congregation and making such claims for himself today. Such a person would soon be in the hands of the police or the psychiatrists.

(5) He claimed the prerogatives of God. He claimed to be able to forgive sins, eliciting from His enemies a charge of blasphemy, since "Who can forgive sins but God only?" He associated Himself with God and God's work when He said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work". "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). It is true that He taught His disciples to address God as Father also, but it was a different relationship. He said to Mary Magdalene, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father" (John 20:17). He did not say our Father. When He taught His disciples to pray He said, "When you pray say our Father."

So close and so unique was the relationship of Jesus with the

Father that He equated a man's attitude to Himself with his attitude to God. To know Him was to know God (John 8:19); to see Him was to believe in God (John 12:44); to receive Him was to receive God (Mark 9:37); to hate Him was to hate God (John 5:23); and to honour Him was to honour God (John 5:23).

No one can doubt as they read the four Gospels that Jesus Christ claimed for Himself to be the Messiah, Redeemer, Master, Judge and God. To claim is one thing; to justify and vindicate the claim is another.

Here we find ourselves in a dilemma.

"Christ was sinless, and yet was condemned as a malefactor;
He was the truth, and yet was condemned for falsehood;
He came fulfilling the law, and yet was condemned as a law-breaker;

He claimed to be a King, and yet was condemned as a traitor;
He was a worker of miracles, and yet was condemned as a sorcerer;

He claimed to be a forgiver of sins, and yet was condemned as an imposter;

He claimed to be God, and yet was condemned as a blasphemer."
(H. B. Ottley).

Griffith Thomas asks, "Was ever a human being seen like this?"

A man exemplifying the passive virtues combined with unique majesty;

A man challenging attention to His sinlessness and meekness, and yet obviously sincere;

A man claiming unlimited power, and yet ever expressing His dependence on God;

A man possessed of undaunted courage, and yet characterized by exceptional meekness;

A man interested in the smallest details of individual lives, and yet conscious of possessing unusual relations with God and man.

A man deeply impressed with the awful realities and consequences of human sin, and yet ever possessed by a sunny optimism which faced the facts and looked forward to sin's eternal destruction;

A man born and educated amid sorrow and narrowing Jewish tradition, and yet characterised by an originality and a universality which rises infinitely above all natural and racial limits;

A man of perfect humility, absolute sincerity, entire sinlessness, and yet all the while actually asserting Himself to be humble, sincere, and sinless.

This is the dilemma. How are we to reconcile this self-assertion on the one hand with that high degree of personal character which has been recognised by sympathisers and antagonists alike? So convinced was He of His own central place in the purpose of God that He undertook to send Someone to take His place after He had returned to Heaven. This was the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.

C. S. Lewis, who himself came from a position of agnosticism to belief in God, says, "The one thing we mustn't say is 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said wouldn't be a great moral teacher. He'd either be a lunatic - on a level with the man who says he's a poached egg - or else he'd be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse! You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His Feet and call Him Lord and God."

To be in a position to make the inevitable choice concerning the validity of the claims of Christ, it would be helpful next to consider:

2. THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

John wrote, "We beheld His glory full of grace and truth." It is not only the presence of these two elements of grace and truth in Jesus Christ that calls for attention, it is also the combination.

Grace by itself might easily lead to weakness and mere sentimentality;

Truth by itself might easily be expressed in sternness and animosity.

These two opposites are perfectly balanced in Christ. Other contrasts are also blended in His character, such as caution and courage, tenderness and severity, sociability and aloofness. In Him there is sorrow without moroseness, joy without frivolity, spirituality without asceticism, freedom without license, earnestness without fanaticism.

Although Jesus Christ is historical and Jewish, it is evident that He transcends the limits of Judaism. Nor is it a Gentile picture. There is nothing in Greece or Rome to account for His character. The greatest persons with these backgrounds have never revealed anything approaching the grace and truth manifested in Jesus Christ.

(1) What did His enemies think of Him? The Jews followed Him from place to place, watched Him with keen-eyed endeavour to entrap Him in word or deed. Pilate and Herod who were classic examples of cleverness and cruelty could find no guilt in Him, and He was condemned at last only by the 'cooked up' evidence of false witnesses.

They accused Him of blasphemy because He claimed to forgive sins;

They accused Him of consorting with bad company. He was called the "friend of sinners";

They accused Him of carelessness in religious observance such as fasting;

They accused Him of Sabbath breaking because He healed on the Sabbath Day.

All these accusations were either trivial or question-begging. Eventually His enemies had to concede certain matters in His favour.

Pilate stated that he was innocent of this man's blood;

Herod could find no fault in Him either (Luke 23:15)
 Judas cried, "I have betrayed innocent blood";
 The penitent thief - "This man has done nothing wrong".
 The centurion said, "Certainly this man was innocent".
 (Luke 23:47)

(2) What did His friends think of Him?

The disciples lived in close intimacy with Jesus for about three years; they ate together; they slept together; they fished from the same boat. He was there when the disciples quarrelled. But familiarity did not, in this case, breed contempt.

John makes reference to Christ's sinlessness. He declares that all men are sinners, and that if we say we have no sin, or have not sinned, we are both liars ourselves and make God a liar. John also states that in Christ, who was manifested to take away our sins, there is no sin... (I John 3:5). He wrote, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain and hath redeemed us by His blood to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory and blessing."

(3) What did Christ think of Himself?

"The moral perfection of Jesus which was quietly claimed by Him, confidently asserted by His Apostles, and reluctantly acknowledged by His enemies, is clearly exhibited in the Gospels". (J.R.W. Stott, P. 42, "Basic Christianity").

In His prayers there is no evidence of any defect ever being confessed by Him to God. He was always preaching repentance to others, but never repented of sins of His own, because He had none. He was always denouncing sin, but never confessed to any in Himself.

When the noblest saints come nearer the holiness of God, the more conscious they become of their own lack of holiness. Yet, in the case of Jesus Christ, there's not only the absence of sin, but from time to time the declaration of His own holiness and meekness. There is not a trace of that self-deprecation which in others is always associated with the

highest character.

Our acceptance, therefore, of the claims of Christ is made easier by the assessment of His character which leaves nothing to be desired. The most telling argument of all, however, in answering the question "Who is this?" is the Resurrection.

3. THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

The central theme of the early Christian's witness to the world was the fact that Jesus Christ, who was crucified, had been raised from the dead. The Cross and the Resurrection were linked together. Without the Resurrection the Cross is meaningless. Apart from the Resurrection the Cross was a tragedy and a defeat. Christianity as a system of truth collapses if the Resurrection is rejected. St. Paul said, "If Christ be not risen then is our preaching vain, and your faith is vain also." (I Cor. 15:14).

Fifty years ago when the tomb of Tutankhamen, the Egyptian Pharaoh, was opened his mummified body was found after 3000 years; a message of death. When the disciples came to Christ's tomb on the third day, the tomb was empty; a message of life. He had risen from the dead. The discovered treasures of Egypt are not to be compared with the unsearchable riches of Christ.

To think on Christ is to think on what is true, honourable just, pure, lovely, and gracious. The word in the original Greek "to think" means more than to keep in mind or remember or commemorate. The Bible is not concerned with mental reflection for its own sake. It requires action. St. Paul said, "Those things you have learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do. Put your thinking into action. Believe in Christ and follow Him. Declare your faith in the Son of God, and the God of peace will be with you."