



THE LECTERN
HOLY TRINITY CHURCH

UNDERSTANDING CHRIST'S HARD WORDS

"I AND THE FATHER ARE ONE"

SPECIAL LENTEN ADDRESSES

1. "HATE YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER" - - - - - Rev. John E. Gelding
2. "I AND THE FATHER ARE ONE" - - - - - Rev. Philip H. E. Thomas
3. "THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST" - - - - - Rev. Lance R. Shilton
4. "THE UNFORGIVABLE SIN" - - - - - Rev. Lance R. Shilton
5. "EAT MY FLESH" - - - - - Rev. Anthony G. Tress
6. "WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?" - - - - - Rev. Philip H. F. Thomas

PRICE 10 CENTS EACH

CHRIST'S HARD WORDS
"I AND THE FATHER ARE ONE"
John 10:30

Whatever else may be said about his achievements, it must be admitted that man is a deeply dissatisfied animal. We can see around about us, as we can experience within our own lives, a sense of this dissatisfaction that stems from personal inadequacies within, and environmental pressures without. The Bible offers a clear, but disturbing, analysis as to why mankind may experience the sense of frustration and dissatisfaction. Paul talks about it, for instance, in the opening chapters of Romans. There he speaks of men who are searching for God, searching where evidence abounds, and yet, who are both unable and unwilling to evaluate that evidence and act upon it. Paul goes on to speak of men who are therefore under condemnation, under the judgment of God, and whose life and life situation exactly reflects that alienated condition.

Of course, the question this dissatisfaction puts is not always in theological terms such as a search for God. In some cases, it is rather a yearning to know of some ultimate truth or, even one step removed from that, the yearning to know whether ultimate truth even exists. Is there a meaning behind this life that we live? Do we head in any direction, or are we simply swept with every current of thought, every wind of destiny, to an end over which we have no control?

Others, forsaking what they would see as a sterile rationalism, look for a final experience to be found in human relationships, mystical experience, through the fantasy of a drugged world - some sort of experience that would give them an anchor to hold onto - something by which they can guide their life - something which will give value to all else that they know of.

It is only under certain circumstances, of course, that people like you and I are willing to examine these big issues, these vast cosmic question marks which hang over the very way that we live and think and act. It is only under even more

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specific circumstances that we are willing to put the question theologically and say, "Where does God come into this? How can I know? How can I know Him?" Too often it is easier simply to ignore the question and never seek for the answer. It is only when circumstances change and the question forces itself upon us that we are compelled to think and to examine and to come to some solution that can make life bearable and meaningful once again.

I was impressed recently, in this respect, reading the memoirs of an unknown New Zealand airman who died during the last war. A book published under the title "The Pitcher and the Well" was simply his rambling thoughts written in a German prison hospital in the weeks before he died of the burns that he had suffered when his plane crashed. As he reflects upon what he calls his approaching annihilation, that final levelling which stands behind all our religious questioning, he says, "I'd like to say, 'Who cares?', but I can't, for I do. I'd like to have a word to a padre. But perhaps the padres would be scared of me. I might upset them. My relentless search for certainty might upset theirs." And then thinking more of the claims of the God he is beginning to grope towards - "What a climb down that would be, to crawl to Him as I die after despising Him all my life, and certainly living in a way He must despise. No, not despising Him, despising those who believed in Him just because I personally couldn't feel the need for a first cause. Anyway, why ask the padre? In a short time I'll know better than he does. There'll be resolving of all doubts soon. What a position for a navigator! His job is to get you there and get you back."

And then a little later on as his mind begins to wander, he chances upon a verse that he must have learnt as a child: "Ye are all one in Christ Jesus." In a moment of lucidity he says, "I'd like to meet Him. His words, garbled, distorted wilfully at times, and wrenched from their context, still seemed to offer hope to a way out of this mess." (1) That unknown man facing the ultimate questions of life and death, was compelled to think again about the Stranger of Galilee. John Stewart Mill, the 19th Century philosopher, a man who was trained from his earliest days to have done with superstition, with traditional thinking, with religion, was forced in his later

days to say, "A unique figure, this Jesus, not more unlike all His predecessors than all His followers."

In this series of addresses on the Hard Words of Christ we, too, are compelled to look in a new way at Jesus Christ. Because of the nature of these utterances, we must look not at what men say of Him, not at what the Church traditionally has said of Him, or what we believe it has said, but to look rather at Christ Himself. The sayings are hard in different ways. Some are hard to understand. Others are hard to put into practice. The words that we have before us as the title of our address are hard in another way; they are hard because they present us with a moral challenge - a challenge which is not addressed simply intellectually, but to our whole person, for the man who says, "I and the Father are One" demands a decision. Did He speak truly? This unique Man who lived twenty centuries ago - was He God, or something else? Our response forms a part of the ultimate questioning which will give our life substance and meaning for all the days which lie ahead.

THE AFFIRMATION:

These words of Jesus were spoken in a time of controversy and debate which we heard of in our Second Lesson tonight (John 10: 19-42). The occasion - winter. Mid-December in Jerusalem. The Feast of Dedication was one of the lesser, but nevertheless significant, Festivals, and Jews from all over the world congregated in the Holy City. Jesus was walking in the Temple in the porch of Solomon, the oldest part of the Temple construction, probably at that time thronging with pilgrims who would be taking refuge from the bitter Palestinian winter evening. As the crowd was thronging around Him, they began to direct questions to Him once again. They said, "How long will you keep us in suspense? We want to know. It's becoming important to us. You're suggesting things. You keep on hinting. You're doing amazing things and we want to know. Speak, don't hide it. Are you the Christ, or not?"

In the words of Jesus which follow, He indicates that His coming marks a watershed of opinion among the Jewish people. He comes as a man of crisis; a man who gathers up all they know of the Old Testament, and posits a radical choice. These words lead to the culminating sentence which forms our text, "I and the

Father are One." And it was on the choice surrounding these words that men were to be divided into one category or another.

Let me read you those words of Jesus again. In Verses 25-30 of John Chapter 10, Jesus said, "I've told you plainly and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's Name, they bear witness to Me. But you do not believe because you do not belong to My sheep." And then He says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. But I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father Who has given them to Me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are One."

Those who acknowledge the claims of Christ are identified in six ways. They are spoken of as people of sensitivity towards God, as Jesus takes that familiar Eastern image of the sheep who recognises and responds to the shepherd's voice. He speaks of Christians as being people who experience fellowship. "I", said Jesus, "know them." They are people of obedience, for "they follow Me." And then He says that they are men and women who have chosen life - a life which Jesus characterizes as eternal, a phrase not to be understood simply in terms of its duration, but rather of its quality. All men must face the ultimate questions, but not all face them in the same way. The quality of living which is called eternal is a quality in which ultimate issues are faced in the confidence that even now, through trust in Christ, life is lived in a dynamic union with God Himself.

The one decisive thing concerning the Christian is that he has a new quality of life, and this life leads to a sense of assurance. "And they shall never perish", says Jesus. Eternal life leads to creative living because it begins to unlock the insoluble problems that men and women face all their days.

And finally, it is a life of security. The security of the Gospel says that God has grasped such people, and His grasp is not to be broken by "life or death, or any other creature." (Rom. 8: 38-39). The implication, of course, is that those who do not fall into this category fall into a category which must be understood quite differently. Jesus characterized it Himself when He simply said to the Jews, "I've told you, but you don't believe Me." The

distinctive quality of their life was one of obstinacy - an obstinacy not just an unwillingness to face the facts, which was based upon their own self-centredness. Instead of fellowship, their relationship with Jesus Christ was one of alienation. It was exhibited in their works and in their words, and led them in the end to crucify Him. Instead of obedience there was rebellion; instead of life, death; in place of assurance, an unseen, but nevertheless real, danger; in place of security, there was ultimately perdition.

THE REACTION:

But it was as Christ went on and identified this life which is lived in the presence of God with Himself, that the tumult really arose. He went on to express the Father's goodwill, and then said, "I and the Father are One." Through long centuries the Jews had learnt the hard lesson of the One God, the Holy God. And now, in the light of that lesson, these men rose up in fury to cast Christ out. He avoided them once, and then towards the end of that Chapter He flees.

The lesson, of course, was not at fault. It was a long lesson which had begun right back through two thousand years - the call of an obscure Mesopotamian, Abraham. This man had discerned within the whole migratory events of his day, as people left their homeland at the neck of the Persian Gulf and moved through the Fertile Crescent down towards the lands of Egypt, that God had challenged him to cast all aside and go out and enter into a new inheritance. His descendants, as we heard partly in our First Lesson (Genesis 43:1-15), learned through the hardly forged experiences of life that God was a great and a holy God, a God Who called for their absolute obedience. Then as they passed through that terminal experience which we know as the exodus, as Moses their great leader led them into the Promised Land, they learned also of God's rewards of obedience. Through the years of the conquest and through their residency in ancient Israel they learnt the simple lessons of day by day trust that brought God's rich blessing upon their nation. Then gradually, through the prophets, the people began to catch a vision of this God Who was great and powerful, as also being a God Who was One, and Who was totally a God of love. They had learnt their lesson well, and Christ's claim to be equal with God came to them as a scandal. This was blasphemy of the deepest sort.

This was a threat to their very existence as a people. Raging, they sought to cast Him out. In similar ways the claim of Christ to be equivalent and equal with God the Father comes as an offence to 20th Century ears.

I have only ever met one person who claimed to be God, and the extent of his delusion was tragically disturbing. But when Jesus Christ makes the same claim we are disturbed in a different manner.

Problems, of course, immediately emerge when we read passages like this from the New Testament. And one that will undoubtedly be presented to you by various people who knock on your door and try to sell you magazines or Bibles, is the fact that these very words of Jesus are apparently contradicted only a few Chapters later on. (John 14: 28). They point to verses which John also records when Jesus says that "the Father is greater than I," and the question comes up, "Surely this is a contradiction?" But not necessarily so. We need to understand something of the force of this word "greater". We need to understand the whole of the coming of Christ and all that it involved. It involved the Christ who was born as a baby, who died as a suffering Servant, but also who rose and ascended, a conquering, eternal Lord. And the words which Jesus spoke at that later date concerning the greater quality of the Father were referring not to any sense of moral status, but rather to a difference of temporary state. The very context of those verses indicates this. He spoke not of His present standing, but of His eternal standing. At present He assumed all the limitations of humanity - even death; but the true situation would be seen in the future that was His beyond the Cross. Then the Name to be granted to Him would be beyond every name (Phil. 2). And in that day the true equivalence of the Father and the Son would be seen. The New Testament is united in its testimony - Jesus Christ is Lord. Very God of Very God.

And then, of course, a second problem can sometimes be thrown up. It is said, "But does the New Testament say that?" Most of us as Christians, as we discuss with our front-door visitors, or think through the question in moments of quietness know how thin our knowledge of the Bible really is. It seems that these are the only verses we can call on to speak of the

deity of Christ and of His pre-existent equality with the Father. But let's think again. Let's begin with the opening pages of the New Testament, and think through some of those familiar words - so familiar that their force has been robbed from us - words addressed by Matthew to his readers. He speaks of the birth of Jesus and says that all this was necessary to fulfil the words of a prophet, Isaiah, who had written so many years before. He said, "A virgin shall be with child. She shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His Name Immanuel, which is God with us." To Mary, an angel had said: "His kingdom shall be without end." The eternal Lord, the Lord before whom even the night of David's kingdom was but a passing shadow. To the shepherds: "Unto you is born, in the city of David, a child who is Christ the Lord." - kurios, the Lord God - the title which was taken in the Old Testament as referring to Almighty God Himself - was now applied to this child born in a manger. To John the Baptist: "Surely this preaching, these words of authority, these are not like other men. Surely you must be the Christ." And John's emphatic "I am not the Christ" is but the underlining of the emphasis on the words which follow it: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." John's denial but sets in highlight his affirmation that Jesus Christ was God. And so you can find it in the opening verses of the New Testament, and you can go on. At each point, at each terminal point throughout the career of Jesus, at each word which is uttered by His followers, through the letters, through the history of the Early Church, through the Book of Revelation - constantly we find Jesus Christ mentioned not as a man, not even as the greatest of men, not even as an instrument of God, but as God Himself, the Lord of all glory.

THE ARGUMENT:

Bishop Butler said once that not reason but probability was the guide of life. I'd like to suggest to you that we in our normal way of living have an even more acute guide, and that guide is one of moral rectitude; of consistency; that things are what they appear to be, that good in the end will be rewarded, that evil in the end will be punished. It's the basis of the child-like mind so commended in the Gospel. The certainty that Cinderella will get to the ball; the certainty that the glass slipper though lost, will lead to a final reward; the certainty that little Black Sambo will get his new clothes back from the

wicked tigers; that someone (a child) will dare to say that the king has no fine clothes at all! Children think this way quite naturally, and in our better moments so do we. Moral rectitude is the very guide of life. In other words, good is good. And we could argue philosophically if we wish to, that this is one result of the remaining vestiges of the image of God of which the opening Chapters of the Bible speak.

How does this apply to the claim of Christ to be equal to the Father? Well, it applies in many respects, and particularly in that Christ's claims were quite morally consistent with His character. Christ was different from the person whom I met who was deluded into thinking that he was God, firstly in the immensity of His claims. His claims were initially that He was in a unique relationship to the Father. We see it here as He speaks of "My" Father. And at times He turns to the disciples and says, "Your" Father. Although they were to be drawn in the closest intimacy to God, yet there was still to be a difference between Christians and their Lord. Similarly, there was a difference in His attitude towards the Law. "You've heard it said, but I say to you...." And Christ took it upon Himself to fill-in and to adjust the Old Testament Mosaic Law. (John 20:17; Matt. 5:21, 27, etc.) We see again the magnitude of His claim when in John's Gospel so often He uses the phrase "I am": "I am the Bread of Life", "I am the Resurrection and the Life", and so on. The phrase used was that term which was used in the Hebrew Scriptures for the very Name of God, - "I am that I am". And Christ assumed this title for Himself and used it as designating His own character.

Along with His direct and indirect claims to deity, we find that He purports to forgive sins, and by His miraculous power He is able to demonstrate His authority to do just that. The miracles themselves are a further evidence of this claim of Christ to be equal with God, and particularly the event of the Resurrection. (John 6:35 et al; Matt. 9:6; Romans 1:4).

These claims are certainly vast in their magnitude. They once again indicate that this doctrine of the deity of Christ and His equivalence with God is something far beyond a passing reference or something imposed by the Early Church on the basic New Testament record.

But the claims are made even more significant when we compare them with the Character of Christ. We have seen what some thought of Him, and the words of Carnegie Simpson are acute: "Instinctively", he says, "we do not class Him with others. When one reads His Name in a list beginning with Confucius and ending with Goethe, we feel as if it is an offence less against orthodoxy than against decency. Jesus is not one of the group of the world's great. Talk about Alexander the Great and Charles the Great and Napoleon the Great if you will, but Jesus is apart. He is not the great - He is the only - He is simply Jesus; nothing could add to that." He goes on to quote the well-known epigram of Charles Lamb who said to a circle of writers that if Shakespeare were to come into a room they would stand in admiration. If Jesus was to come in, they would kneel and reach for the hem of His garment.

The Character of Christ was something which He Himself laid open for all to see. "Which of you", He said on one occasion, "accuses Me of sin?" And His most bitter enemies were scared to speak. His relationship with the Father, in that fine phrase of C.S. Lewis, was that of a "calm which no storm has preceded." If you read biographies of some of the great saints and mystics of old you'll be impressed by this fact, that as they grew in grace and holiness of life and manner, then they were more and more impressed with their own failings. And yet this man Jesus, Who lived in a union with God, closer than could ever be suggested by the greatest mystic, was able to say that "I always do My Father's Will", and none could contradict Him. (John 8:29).

I recall, almost two years ago now, being involved in a most exciting experience of apologetics when Leighton Ford, who was conducting a Crusade in Adelaide at the time, was confronted by various students in the Union Building at the University of Adelaide. Amidst the various questions one came up, "Dr. Ford, what would you say if I told you in all sincerity that I, too, was the Son of God?" Leighton Ford, with a fine sense of timing, countered, "Well, first of all, I'd ask your room-mate." And he went on to express one of the truths of the New Testament, that it was the opinion of Christ's friends, and even more significantly, the opinion of His enemies, that there was nothing inconsistent with His claim to be God.

We can look at the testimony of friends in the course of the Acts and Epistles of the New Testament, but the enemies concur. Just think of it: an illegal trial, put on at a time when none could be there to realise the miscarriage of justice that was being perpetrated; the witnesses who were paid to offer false evidence, and even then were unable to agree; the words of Pilate, "Surely this is a just man"; the strange dream of Pilate's wife, "Have nothing to do with this person"; the response of the penitent thief, "Lord, remember me when you come to your Kingdom"; the centurion, who, as Jesus died, said "Surely this was the Son of God."

THE PROPOSITION:

It is significant evidence. It is evidence which ties in with that criteria of moral rectitude that things are what they appear to be, that good men are rewarded, that evil men are punished. The claims of Christ tie in with His Character. I don't want to try and argue you rationally into accepting that Christ was God. I could not and would not attempt to do that. But I would ask you to look at the evidence for what it is. I would ask that at times when you, too, are facing the ultimate questions, that you would also look at one of the sources from which you might find a satisfactory reply. I would ask you to look at yourself deeply, and to look even more deeply at the Son of God and all that the New Testament has to say of Him. For when Jesus said, "I and the Father are One", He was doing one of several things. He was possibly joking, but this was a time of utmost seriousness. This was no joking matter. He could have been lying for effect. But at no other time did He suggest that even the greatest ends justified means of deceit. Another alternative was that He was mad. Yet a man's measure is seen when pressured - and in the fiercest moments His words and acts did not indicate a mind in any way impaired. Perhaps, then, the disciples misunderstood His words. But they, too, were those schooled in the lessons of Jewish monotheism. A claim like that of Jesus could hardly pass as a slip of the pen. Neither does a dead martyr inspire hopes of divinity in even the most partial witness of his death. The disciples knew what He said - and recorded it unambiguously.

Finally, there is another alternative. That is that Jesus Christ told the truth. That He is God. That He is the

revelation of the Father. That He is the way, the truth, and the life: and that no man may come to that Father, but by Him.

--oOo--

A PRAYER

O GOD, give us the courage to face the facts concerning Jesus Christ; and grace to find in Him our access to You and to eternal life.

Amen.

- (1) Author unknown - "The Pitcher and The Well", P. 206, 219.
- (2) P. Carnegie Simpson - "The Fact of Christ", P. 19 -22.

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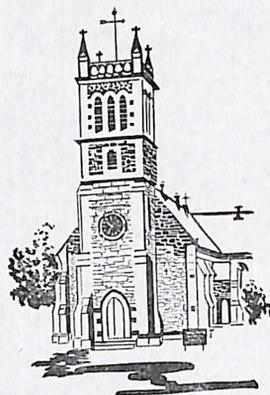
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