

"THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST"

INTRODUCTION

I'm sure that it is a good thing for us, from time to time, to have a sermon on what I call "looking at Jesus" - for the heart of our faith rests in Him - in our understanding of Him, in our relationship with Him, and thus it is of supreme importance that we see Him as clearly as we can and occasionally look at Him from different angles.

The sermon today is largely the result of some thinking that I have been doing over these past two weeks. At the coffee hour following the service two weeks ago, a young man told me how much he appreciated the fact that so many of the sermons I preach seem to stress the "humanity" of Jesus, that is, the reality of his human life. I told him that personally I felt that the closer you come to Jesus as a man, as a real person who lived at a particular time in history, the more likely you will be able to find in Him the reality of God. Since that Sunday, however, I have been wondering if I should not perhaps balance off the emphasis on his "humanity" with a sermon on his "divinity". This is what I should like to talk to you about today - "The Divinity of Christ".

DEVELOPMENT

Apparently from the very beginning there was something about Jesus that made people stand in awe of Him. It's difficult for us to describe just what it was. Certainly, there was nothing pompous about him; children would have been the first ones to detect this and they would have stayed away from Him, but they didn't. Nor was there anything in the least eerie or spooky about him, like a ghost in a graveyard. Yet there was something about Him that made a man like Peter, who, from everything we know about him was a perfectly normal, natural human being, not given to mystical impulses that were beyond the realm of ordinary experience, kneel in the presence of Jesus.

This was something that both his friends and his enemies felt. You get this impression as you read through the Gospel account. They felt it when he was moving about among them - healing, teaching and preaching. They felt it more than ever before when he was dying. Words are inadequate to describe what you feel when you read the story of the crucifixion. It was not only sad and cruel, but painful; there was something terrible about it. It was something that made people feel dread; it was something that was reflected in the eclipse of the sun and the quaking of the earth; it made men tremble. And when Jesus finally died, one of the Roman soldiers who had been watching the whole procedure said, "Surely this man was the Son of God". He wasn't making any theological statement about Jesus such as we now make when we use those words; he was saying what a great many people had felt all along, but had perhaps never put into words; that there was something God-like about Jesus. C. S. Lewis, in a wonderful phrase, spoke of Jesus as "lit by a light from another world".

I suppose that this is what Charles Lamb had in mind when on one occasion he was discussing greatness with some of his literary friends remarked: "If Shakespeare was to come into this room, we would all rise up to meet him; but if Jesus Christ were to come

into it, we should all fall down and try to kiss the hem of his garment". There was something about Him that men and women have stood in awe of, something unearthly about Him that we cannot escape, something from the very beginning that has persisted across twenty centuries, something that we can describe only as God-like!

THIS QUALITY IS NOT
PECULIAR TO JESUS

This particular quality is not peculiar to Jesus. We are now beginning to move out into deeper waters, and some people may not be prepared to follow us in this first move, but we make it, nevertheless, in the confidence that it is true to our knowledge of Jesus and to our knowledge of ourselves. Other people have had this quality in varying degrees. Let me mention two persons of our own time who apparently have had this to some degree, and let me mention what others have written about them.

Among the men of our time, Gandhi must have had this quality to an exceptional degree. Vincent Sheean tells us that he was stirred by something that he felt in Gandhi, that he travelled half way around the earth to see him and when he came into the presence of the man whom he believed to have the key to something great, he wrote: "What I have encountered, quite beyond expectation or probability, was a manifestation of divine pity". There was apparently, something about Gandhi that people stood in awe of.

And from all accounts, Albert Schweitzer, has something of this same quality. One person who knows him well, wrote this: "If Christ is anywhere in the world today, he is in Schweitzer, and Schweitzer is in him". I remember reading some time back that when Schweitzer visited this country (I think it was in the early 1950's.) that one of the country's greatest organists was anxious to meet him, as all organists are glad to meet Schweitzer. This organist was anticipating this event more than anything else that had taken place in his own life. He had all sorts of questions to ask him about organs and organ building and organ composition and, above all, Bach, and the editorial work that he had done on Bach's works. He said this: "When I met him, every one of those questions simply went out of my mind at once. I felt as though I were in the presence of holiness".

What I would suggest is that the veil between the temporal and the eternal is sometimes very thin. And I think that this needs to be said in our day when we are likely to become discouraged about human nature, and the theologians are reviving the doctrine of human depravity, and when some of them go so far as to say that there is a great gulf fixed between God and man, and that nothing can ever really bridge it. The veil between the temporal and the eternal is sometimes very thin, and the human and the divine are sometimes closely intermingled. Some people are infinitely more transparent than others, but no one (and this is, of course, a generalization for which I have no proof), no one is completely opaque to the divine. The very fact that he is alive is a testimony that there is something divine in him because his life is not his own, but comes from sources greater than himself.

Not even you and I, with all of our shortcomings and all of our failures to let the better things come through in our lives, not even you and I are opaque to the divine. We have those moments, rare to be sure, but nevertheless real, when the divine light filters through our clouded lives. In this we are all akin to Jesus.

However, (having said that I would now say this, and I hope you will listen carefully for I would not want to be misinterpreted) the difference between Jesus and the rest of us is what whereas in human beings the veil between the divine and the human is incredibly thin, in Jesus it disappears altogether. There isn't any veil. The human nature which is normally a veil between the divine and the human suddenly becomes the perfect human vehicle for the divine. In Jesus, it is not the sun shining through a thinner or a thicker screen, it is the sun shining without any screen at all. In Jesus it is not the love of God breaking through to us in bits and in fragments here and there; it is the love of God becoming a man. The theme of the Christian Gospel is the fact that God is Christ-like, that in Jesus God came into the world to make himself known, so that His power and love might be released to renew the lives of men.

This is something that people either respond to or they don't. It is not something that can be proved in a scientific laboratory. I think you know that without my saying it. This is something that can only be proclaimed and affirmed. It has been and will be for years to come. And the amazing thing is that so many people do respond to it.....to this tremendous statement that God is Christ-like, that that which lies behind the universe can be measured by the quality of the life that was in Jesus. This is a tremendous thing to say, and the amazing thing is that so many people across the ages of time have said: "Yes, there is something here that rings a bell, so to speak, with me.....that strikes a responsive note in my being. I can't answer all of the questions that it raises; I haven't all of the evidence in hand, but if I had to bet my life on something, I would be willing to bet my life that when I meet God at the end, He will be like Jesus!"

TWO QUESTIONS Most of you have been brought up in this atmosphere of faith; it is nothing new to you. You accept it and take it for granted in much the same manner you accept and take for granted the Declaration of Independence. Others of you feel it deeply. You may have gone through deep waters to arrive at it. You live by it from day to day and you try to answer and interpret all of the questions that life presents to you in light of this great assurance. Some may have questions in the back of their minds concerning it. There are many questions it raises especially in this day and age when we see the knowledge of our universe expanding more and more. My four and half year old son, David, put one to me Thursday evening of this past week. "Daddy" he said, "These people that die and go home to God and to see Jesus.....are these the same people that live on the moon and the people Scott McCloud goes to visit?" There are two questions that hinge on these things that we have been thinking about here today, and in the time that remains I should like to raise them with you.

The first is, Why would God reveal himself so finally and so fully in one particular person? I must be honest and say that I do

not have the answer to that question. I answer it by asking another question: why did the flower of ancient culture grow in one small land within a period of less than 200 years? The culture of Greece I am referring to. Aeschylus, Euripedes, Sophocles, Pericles, Phidias, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle - what a gallery....all living within 119 years of each other in a little collection of islands. So much compressed into so little. And why did the beauty of the Renaissance concentrate itself in a little strip of Italy. Florence was the center, overflowing into the hills towns of Assisi and Perugia, Ravenna and Siena. A few miles to the north in Genoa there was not a trace of that magic. And why is it that the music of the western world was largely packed into about 200 years of German life, from Bach to Brahms.

God has a way of concentrating His energies, and it doesn't seem strange to me, in light of these things that we know, that at one time He should concentrate His energies in a small group of people living in a small, obscure land, and ultimately in one person, namely Jesus, in whom His love and goodness were personified. God seems to work in the clear lines of the particular and specific.

The other question is this: can the revelation of God, made two thousand years ago, still have meaning for us? Our world is so much bigger and much more complicated than the world of Jesus. We can imagine, perhaps, the love of Christ solving the problems of the world of the first century, but is it any match for our world? - the world of hydrogen bombs and guided missiles? The problems of the world are the same now and they were then. They stem from human selfishness and sin. They involve personal fears and anxieties. And the only way you can change the world is by changing the people in it. And there is only one way to change them for the better.

Think of it this way. Suppose a father had a wayward son. Could he force him into goodness? Could he threaten him? Could he cast him out, or buy him off? He could only love him. And even this might not save him, but nothing else could.

One day a missionary was telling the story of the Prodigal Son to a group of boys and girls in India, and he took the opportunity to elaborate on it. When did the boy come to himself and change, he asked? Not when he was starving among the husks that the swine did eat; not when his father came out to kiss him; but several days later when he suddenly realized that in his absence his father's hair had turned grey. Is there anything stronger, greater than that? Whether they are the problems of the world, or our own personal problems...Is there anything more ultimate than that?

Is it not possible then to say that Jesus is not only the word of God to men, but that he is the last word....last in the idiomatic sense....the word that sums up, judges and interprets all others. The Parthenon, we say, is the last word in beauty. So Christians say that Jesus is the last word in human character, and he is God's last word about himself, and that last word is the word - LOVE!

PRAYER:

Our Father and our God, thou who didst reveal thyself to us in the person, Jesus, take these inadequate expressions of our thought and faith. And lead us to us a deeper appreciation and a fuller understanding of Jesus as the word of God, made flesh and come to dwell among us. Amen