

## Sermon – 26/06/2006 am

### Plain Speaking

Study Text: John 16:25-31

It is interesting getting missionary prayer letters these days. Sometimes you have to unravel the code in which they are written. I noticed one lately in which words are often incomplete or completed with asterisks. Church becomes ch\*\*\*\* and so on. This person is aware of electronic surveillance. Others no longer talk of their 'mission' agency but of their 'company'. These people want you to understand what they are doing, but not those who might use the information to attack them and hinder the work of the Lord.

In his public ministry Jesus often spoke in parables so that *seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand* (Mark 4:12). If they heard truths of the gospel plainly they would use such truths as ammunition to attack Jesus. When Jesus told the Jews that God was his Father they accused him of blasphemy, of making himself equal with God (5:18).

To his disciples Jesus explained the parables, but they still had difficulty understanding what he meant. Jesus spoke to them figuratively to help them understand, not to hide anything from them. Children need picture books to help them understand, but when they grow up they no longer need pictures. In the immediate context Jesus pictured a woman giving birth to help them understand how their sorrow would turn to joy when they saw him alive again. He also used the picture of the vine to describe their relationship to him.

### I Will Tell You Plainly

Jesus told his disciples *the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language but will tell you plainly about the Father* (16: 25). As he began this discourse in the upper room Jesus knew that his hour had come. *A little while and you will not see me*. He spoke about *that day*, meaning the days after his death and resurrection. Jesus knew the Cross was just around the corner. He knew that he would die and be buried, and that he would rise again and return to his Father.

Jesus did not tell his disciples this in as many words, for they would not have understood. They would not have believed him. What happened when Jesus told his followers/disciples that he was the bread of life sent down from heaven; that he was going to give his flesh and his blood that they may have life? *This is a hard saying; who can understand it* they said (6:60f). He went on to tell them at that time that he would *ascend to where he was before*. And many turned back and walked with him no more.

The twelve, however, stayed, believing that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God (6:69). Jesus persevered with these twelve, and then the eleven, trying to get them to understand. He told them things again and again, and he used figurative language. Still they grasped little of what he told them was going to happen in the very near future.

As we see the disciples struggling to understand what Jesus was telling them we should be both humbled and thankful. Humbled, because they were men, human beings, just like us. It

was not that they were uneducated, though that was true. But the learned scribes and teachers of the law comprehended even less of what Jesus said – even if they thought they knew everything. Their knowledge made them proud, a quality that prevents comprehension of Jesus Christ and belief in him (Mark 10:15).

When a person thinks they know everything – and there is no shortage of such people – they are walking on dangerous ground. As we read this passage, and as we read the rest of the Bible, we realise how little we know about the Triune God and about his kingdom. More often than not you will find the person who boasts about his knowledge is the one who knows very little of what truly matters. The person who digs deep into the word of God will be humbled, realising how little they know of the vastness of the knowledge of God.

We should be thankful that we live in the ‘last days’, in *that day* that Jesus spoke of. We live not only with the benefit of hindsight, but of the teaching handed down to us by the apostles after they received the Holy Spirit. Imagine if you only had the Old Testament for a Bible as they did. Yes, that was their Bible. Today many think we can do without the Old Testament. Imagine if we only had the gospels. There are those who think this is all we need. They cannot understand the Old Testament and they do not like what Paul teaches. How blessed we are to have the whole Bible as the complete and final revelation of the knowledge of God.

So the disciples had great difficulty understanding Jesus’ imminent death, resurrection and ascension. After he rose from the dead he explained this truth to them plainly, without figurative language. Look at Luke 24:44f. *He opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures. He said to them, thus it is written and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day. Why was it necessary? Because it was written – yes. But read on. That repentance and remission of sins should be preached to all nations.*

With the help of the Holy Spirit they understood and began to preach Christ crucified, and to call people to repent and believe in Jesus – and no one could stop them! How is your knowledge of God? Does it have any effect on how you live?

### **The Father Loves You**

In that day Jesus would speak to them plainly. He would speak to them *plainly about the Father* (16:25). He would tell them how God’s great plan of salvation spoken of in the Scriptures was fulfilled in him. Jesus was always ready to give glory to the Father. It was the Father who sent him into the world, it was the Father who told him all he was to do and say in the world. Jesus was completely obedient to his Father, even unto death.

The disciples at this time looked to Jesus for everything. They were dependant on Jesus. They knew the love of Jesus. Jesus told them of his love and showed them his love. *As the Father loved me so I also have loved you; abide in my love* (15:9). But Jesus was going away. They would no longer enjoy his physical presence.

Jesus told them to pray to the Father in that day. He told them that the *Father himself loves you* (16:27). Because they loved Jesus and believed in him as the Son of God, God the Father automatically loves them. There can be no disunity in the Trinity. The Jews thought they knew the Father and that the Father loved them because they were his chosen ones. But Jesus made it clear that the Father loves those who love his Son and believe in him.

The death of Jesus would remove the barrier between man and God, the barrier of sin. Jesus told his disciples *in that day you will ask (the Father) in my name* (16:23, 26). In prayer they will have direct access to the throne of grace. They will pray in the name of Jesus, but this does not mean that Jesus will be praying for them. They will not be asking Jesus to hear and answer their prayers.

If God has truly forgiven your sin then there is no longer a barrier between you and God. It is amazing but true, that in Jesus Christ you have access to the holy presence of God the Father. How tragic that so many people pray to saints, thinking their merits will carry favour with God. Even Jesus says he will not present your requests to God. *In this manner therefore pray – ‘Our Father in heaven’*.

### Speech is Plain

The disciples suddenly exclaimed *See, now you are speaking plainly and using no figure of speech!* (16:29). Jesus had spoken of a time coming when he would speak plainly – was that time now? Did the disciples suddenly understand everything? By John’s own words later on – no (20:9). Why did they respond in this way?

Look at the words they just heard. *I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again I leave the world and go to the Father* (16:28). With these few words Jesus explained his mission. He knew where he came from and where he was going (8:14).

‘Where did you come from’ and ‘where are you going’ are questions we often ask of one another. And we can ask them of Jesus. Jesus is pleased to answer. The Jews did not understand his answer to either question – nor do many people today. Such simple truths people do not understand because their hearts are blinded.

The disciples did understand where Jesus came from, and this was what they were responding to, as shown in latter part of verse 30. They still did not understand where Jesus was going. They also were humble enough to accept that Jesus knew all things and decided not to question him further.

So they had progressed in their knowledge of God, but were still a long way from understanding that Jesus had to die and be raised from the dead and return to the Father. Jesus sounded a note of caution saying to them *do you now believe?* (16:31). He went on to explain further what was going to happen to him and to them.

How is your knowledge of the Triune God? Do you treasure such knowledge above all else? Which is growing the fastest – your knowledge of God or your knowledge of the world? Maybe you think you know all there is to know about God. It is easy to start thinking ‘I have read it before or I have heard it all before’. Be thankful for the knowledge you have, if that is saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. But do not be proud nor even satisfied, for the more you know, the more you will realise how little you do know about the infinite Triune God, who loves you, who died for you, and who dwells in you.

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