

26. 3. 73

11. 3. 74 ✓

Lecture 91²⁵ (Lecture)Ps 90 (Psalms Hymn)
Psalms
RHK-ARCH.

LENT PREFACE

People are usually careful of their language, I notice, in the presence of clergy or religious — sometimes even rather obnoxiously self-conscious about it, especially if such attention to what they're saying cramps their normal style a bit. What sometimes strikes me about this is the seemingly quite frequent use of our Lord's name and title — each separately, or even both together. And also that this isn't confined to people who are Christians or have had contacts with Christianity. I suppose psychologists or sociologists might have some conclusions to draw from the names (as distinct from the words) which are used as expletives in any language; at least one could say that the name, Jesus Christ, is quite familiar now beyond the community of Christians, even if the Person isn't. And while it is distinctly, painful or at times also offensive to hear the name of Christ so carelessly and casually used in conversation, there is perhaps a positive angle to this as well — apart from the fact that there is often no offence or disrespect intended at all. Unlike other religions, we don't really have 'secret names' for which it is necessary to find some pronounceable substitute to use in avoiding speaking the name. In Christ, God is near to us, as near as our own humanity. And because of Him, through Him, in a sense every name has become sacred for His love and salvation reaches out to every man, to the whole universe. So, the familiarity which the common use of the name Jesus Christ implies, is not necessarily a bad thing, though one would wish it to become a different kind of familiarity, with the Person of our Lord as well. Or even that the meaning, significance of His name were thought about.

For Jesus means saviour; Christ means 'the anointed one'. The combination, Jesus Christ, originates from the earliest Christian profession of faith, that Jesus is the Messiah, the saviour sent by God, the Lord's anointed. And when we say 'Jesus Christ is Lord', it's really just a repetition of what His name itself means. Few people who so lightly use His name in their ordinary speech, I suppose, are at all conscious of what they're actually saying, even though they may well be looking for a saviour, a liberator, in their own lives. There are many ways of coming to know Jesus, and I feel the use (or even abuse) of His name can be one of them. Certainly, in the past year or two there have been a couple of developments which have made His name a household word among people who might not otherwise have thought of Him at all — I'm thinking particularly of the rock opera, Jesus Christ Superstar, which everybody has at least heard about. Whatever reservations or stronger reactions you may have to it, it has brought His name and His mission into ordinary conversation; and I imagine more than a few people have done as a non-Christian friend of mine did after seeing the production — go and read the gospel story itself. From accounts I've heard about the ^{stage} production, it does seem to be a powerful and moving presentation, much more so than just the music and words alone. Its idiom may not be acceptable to all, and its theology may leave a lot to be desired, but it does seem to speak of Christ in the modern world and put His name on people's lips — we can pray that it may also put His name in the hearts of people too. For some music in today's programme, let's listen to a song from Jesus Christ Superstar, Magdalene's song "I don't know how to love Him."

MUSIC - PRAYERS

You may not find the 'superstar' image of Christ a particularly appropriate, appealing or attractive one: but it's worth not dismissing off-hand, at least in these weeks of Lent when we try to deepen our appreciation of our faith in Him and our understanding of His saving Passion ^{for us} thro' suffering & death to a new life with His Father which He shares with us. Our faith in Him may begin from some false idea of who He is and what He's done and does for us; but it is based on the fact and message of His Resurrection. During His life on earth Christ was misunderstood - He was expected to be many things which were not in His purpose at all, and even His close friends and the men He was preparing to carry forward His liberation & salvation didn't understand clearly either. His passion and death shocked them - they'd such different hopes.... Yet they had been forewarned by Jesus Himself, and He allowed the closest of them a glimpse beforehand of the glory of His risen life. It was only in the light of His Resurrection that they finally believed, realised who He was and what His purpose was. Before that, He'd had to be a failure: His dying on the cross seemed to be an end to every hope, to every expectation of what He would do for the people. So, the failed, burnt-out superstar idea is at least a good parable, even if you find it hard to accept such an interpretation. But let us pray that we ourselves and the many others who know His name from the billboards & record-albums may learn the lesson & meaning of His suffering & dying, to rise again