

## REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 13 JULY 2008: MORNING SERVICE

**Sing before:** Psalm 51:4

*Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:*

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

**Amen**

Psalm of praise: Psalm 138:1

**Confession of faith:** Apostolic

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, a holy catholic\* Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting

**Amen.**

After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Scripture Versification 9-1:11

Law

Song: Scripture Versification 9-1:11 (Exodus 20:1-17)

**Prayer.**

To You, o Father, with psalms, praising Your glory and majesty, we sing our gratitude. We sing, because in our hearts, there is joy in You and because we are overjoyed in Your mercy and goodwill.

We thank You Lord for granting us another day of rest in which we may have communion with You. A day that we may rest from our daily work and during worship, revel in Your closeness.

Grant that, today in the stillness of our own dwellings, we may experience the closeness and warmth of Your presence.

Lord, in these times of floods, we especially pray for those who have received, in life, less than us. Please grant that for them, change and development may be available, so that through Your mercy, they also may grow out of their wretchedness.

We pray for our country and our government. Lord, we are aware that if we do not honour You, You will punish us and eventually, should no change take place, destroy us.

Lord, through Your Spirit, would You please cause change in every council-chamber? We plea from You that, in Your eyes, what is proper and true should be in every council-chamber and govern all decisions.

Lord, we realise that only true reform will destroy matters like murder and corruption. Only true repentance can cause love, caring and outreaching towards our neighbours.

Please bless us in the preaching of Your Holy Word. Lead us so that we may grow out of the shame of our sins – so that in us, Your image becomes more and more profound.

**Amen.**

Psalm 147:1

Scripture reading: 1 Samuel 2

Scripture text: 1 Samuel 2:34

**And this shall be the sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas: in one day they shall die both of them.**

What kind of future can be expected from a church (nation?) whose leaders are unable to give straight and definite guidance?

Let us look at all that the Lord, through His Word, is revealing about the Israelites and their matters. Through this we can clearly see what the Lord is doing with nations and especially with His church-people.

During the entry Joshua was the leader of the people. He was a strong person giving clear guidance to them.

- After Joshua's death everything fell flat.
- The Lord reveals that all sorts of atrocities are taking place.
- Amongst others the faith-life and relations of the Israelites with God diminished. They worshipped Baal, Asjera and Astarte, all sexual idols.

The Bible teaches that it was a time of everybody doing what they wanted.

**In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.** (Judges 17:6)

Many times, in order to bring them back to true worship, the Lord punished them.

- Every time the Lord also provided a leader-
- Somebody able to stand steadfastly for the Lord.
- Somebody not selling his principles.

As soon as the leader was gone the decay again started and everything went wrong.

When talking about leaders we, of course, have all sorts of prerequisites for such a person.

Look at Eli.

- He came from the proper background – he is a Levite. He is a descendant of Aaron – thus his bloodline is completely in order!
- We also see that he acted as leader for a full 40 years.

Important: we have to look at his heritage.

- How did he rule?
- What became of the people under his rule?

What is obvious is that, between Eli, his sons and their association with the church, there are strong resemblances to the church of today.

- The first resemblance is the lack of principle by Eli and his sons. Everyone does what is good in his own eyes.
- Eli was a coward when it came to punishing his sons. He was unable to take a firm stand and enforce onto them what is right.
- He also did not punish them. He only admonished them in a nice way.

Every time he only said: My sons, do not be like that!

Again listen to how the Lord had it written down in 1 Samuel 2:

**22 Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons did unto all Israel, and how that they lay with the women that did service at the door of the tent of meeting.**

**23 And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings from all this people.**

**24 Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make Jehovah`s people to transgress.**

It is remarkable that when somebody transgresses, this transgression, as well as the result thereof, is known to the transgressor!

- Eli says it clearly. There is no chance of a misunderstanding.
- **ye make Jehovah`s people to transgress.**

Weak leaders cause people, not normally doing wrong deeds, to do so in following their leaders!

In our own times we see the same things happening.

- We could ask ourselves whether the Lord was satisfied with such behaviour. From the passage in the Bible we discover that this type of conduct aggravated the Lord.
- Therefore the Holy Ghost, at a later stage, when this history was recorded, had the Lord's planning with these two men, added:  
**If one man sin against another, God shall judge him; but if a man sin against Jehovah, who shall entreat for him? Notwithstanding, they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because Jehovah was minded to slay them. (1 Samuel 2:25)**

The Lord decided that He would have them killed!

Striking to any reader of the Bible, when reading this history, are the similarities between the history of the olden times and our own history.

- An example is the fact that some leaders in high positions, just like Eli and his sons, often are those setting the worst example.
- Today there also are leaders without any regard for unity among the children of God and thus setting an example of stubbornness and splintering.

Is this any different from the conduct of Hophni and Phinehas?:

**Now the sons of Eli were base men; they knew not Jehovah (1 Samuel 2:12)**

*Should it only have been the leaders going astray, it might not have been so bad – but the problem arises in that those who are weak follow them and are lost also.*

This sin of causing people to fall into sin is, in the eyes of the Lord, very serious. Listen to a few judgements from the New Testament about this:

**It is good not to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor [to do anything] whereby thy brother stumbleth** (Romans 14:21)

**Howbeit there is not in all men that knowledge: but some, being used until now to the idol, eat as [of] a thing sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled** (1 Corinthians 8:7)

**But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to the weak.** (1 Corinthians 8:9)

**And thus, sinning against the brethren, and wounding their conscience when it is weak, ye sin against Christ.** (1 Corinthians 8:12)

In his patience, twice the Lord warns Eli.

Firstly a “man of God” came to Eli. (1 Samuel 2:27-36)

- In the first part of his message it is clear the Lord was deeply disappointed with Eli’s priesthood.
- Eli and his sons could not stick to the truth.
- Also the Lord was highly disgusted because they disrespected the offers instituted by Him.
- He pointed out to them that they did all these things with the sole aim of only furthering themselves.

**And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith Jehovah, Did I reveal myself unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt [in bondage] to Pharaoh’s house? and did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up unto mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings of the children of Israel made by fire? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in [my] habitation, and honorest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?**

After that the Lord continues talking through the man of God. He announces his judgement over Eli and his descendants:

**Therefore Jehovah, the God of Israel, saith, I said :... and there shall not be an old man in thy house for ever. And this shall be the sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas: in one day they shall die both of them.** (1 Samuel 2:27-36)

Because the Lord is very patient with us when we sin - and because He always would rather want somebody to reform – the Lord again is warning!

- This time through the vision of Samuel (1 Samuel 3).
- Eli is the one guiding Samuel into this conversation with the Lord – thus he knew how to obey the Lord and live with Him!
- The Lord told Samuel:  
**In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from the beginning even unto the end.** (1 Samuel 3:12)

Eli's reaction to the revelation by Samuel about the things told to him by the Lord on that day, is:  
**And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is Jehovah: let him do what seemeth him good.** (1 Samuel 3:18)

- Repentance still is lacking. The leader is unable to lead his people and fellow believers in a life of redemption.
- This reaction gives the impression of a fatalistic agreeing (wrongful acceptance) rather than a true redemption.

What is the result of that?

- The leaders, inside, as well as outside of the church, continued with their wickedness.
- Thereby the faith-world as well as the social life of the people connected to these leaders became drenched with impurity.

Often, when you persist in sin, the Lord has the way of lifting his hand from you.

- Then you are destroyed by your own sin.
- This is exactly what the Lord caused to happen to this set of leaders.

A war breaks out. Immediately it is clear that the leaders have no understanding of true worship. It becomes clear that their association with the Lord, in fact, was nothing else, than idolatry and image services (in the church)

**And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath Jehovah smitten us to-day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of Jehovah out of Shiloh unto us, that it may come among us, and save us out of the hand of our enemies.** (1 Samuel 4:3)

The two naughty priests then left to fetch the ark.

**So the people sent to Shiloh; and they brought from thence the ark of the covenant of Jehovah of hosts, who sitteth [above] the cherubim: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.**  
 (1 Samuel 4:4)

What is wrong? The leaders did not know God!

Why not?

- The example set at the temple by the priests did not in life, bind the people to the Lord.
- The symbol or sign, rather than the LORD Himself is revered.

Their mistakes are clearly shown by the wrong decisions taken by them.

- They believe the ark is God.
- Because of that "God" must be present during the battle – the way it is put makes it sound like magic!
- This idolatry is not unknown to the Philistines – therefore they became scared and said:  
**God is come into the camp.** (1 Samuel 4:7)

Hophni and Phinehas who did **not acknowledge the Lord** were the forerunners in the execution of this action. (1 Samuel 4:4)

- Not only for Israel, did they cause the boundaries between the world and the church to disappear,
- They caused it to disappear to the world as well!
- The Philistines as well as the Israelites think the same about the Lord!

The Lord keeps His word – therefore his punishment goes into action. Eli as well as his sons die on the same day.

The total misconception about all these things shows in the words of Phinehas's wife naming her just-born child Ichabod:

**And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel; because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband. (1Samuel 4:21)**

How often do those who have give guidance, give the wrong guidance – guidance according to their own will.

When things then do not work out, the blame is put on the Lord.

- The results are always the same – when they are religious leaders, the believers lose their faith in the church and in the Lord.
- When it is a nation, because all trust in the leaders and their laws are lost, then corruption and wrongdoing increases.

This Ichabod-child is but the image of an Ichabod human breed.

He represents a breed and their leaders, not following the law and the will of God, eventually perishing without any virtue.

The name of this child has a line of development stretching through history towards the Second Coming. Later the apostle Paul again uses the name – but in the description thereof:

**They have all turned aside, they are together become unprofitable; There is none that doeth good, no, not, so much as one: (Romans 3:12)**

Here the Lord is referring to the total mankind – we are thus also included.

- In our deterioration we did not honour the Son of God when He, fulfilling His promise, came to us - thereby we subjected Him to the greatest infamy possible.
- The Lord even predicted that we would be doing this to the Saviour!

**And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his own arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it upheld him. (Isaiah 59:16)**

**But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)**

Like this the Lord is granting mercy to us who are prepared to believe – just like He, in those times, also granted mercy to Israel.

The death of the Lord Jesus on the cross did not unconditionally give to everybody the honour of God's dwelling in them.

- He gives it only to those who believe – those who with sorrow and grief break out from the wrong things in their lives, returning to God.

- They receive the honour of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the main matter He is revealing still holds true: All people, (leaders together with their followers and churches) resisting Him eventually will enter the infamy of hell.

What do we have to do?

We have to put our faith and life of faith in order.

- Against all odds, we have to stand for all that is right – and this we also have to do ourselves.
- Especially in our family lives we will have to return to a strict honest relation with God – a relation based on matters true to God.
- It is of no use to, like Eli, just give mild answers – but then allowing life to carry on in its normal sinful ways.

This passage of history reveals the catastrophic results of such a lifestyle.

We are living under a different dispensation of the will of God than Eli and his children.

- In his times he was still waiting for the coming of the Messiah.
- We are living under the dispensation where God the Holy Spirit has descended upon us and is working within us.

We are thus living under the full guidance of God – and also under the full mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must be different to the world-inclined surrounding us.

**Amen.**

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 149:1

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

**Amen**

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Scripture King James Version