

## REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 20 APRIL 2008: MORNING SERVICE

**Sing before:** Psalm 118:7

*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 146:1+3

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 Psalm 103:2.*

Law

Psalm: 103:2

**Prayer:**

- ***Doxology***
- ***Worship***
- ***Confession of sins***
- ***Forgiveness***
- ***Gratitude***
- ***Prayer for the need of the congregation for the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises.***
- ***General prayer***
- ***Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.***

**Amen**

Psalm: 4:3

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 28

**Text:** 1 Samuel 28:11

*"Then the woman asked, 'whom shall I bring up for you?' Bring up Samuel, he said."*

Where and what is the realm of the dead? What did it mean to the early believers to end up there? Is it possible to come to repentance when there and is it possible to return from it?

Questions of this nature are often asked and people wonder about it – presently there are people who actually deny that death is real!

In this sermon we shall therefore examine what the Bible reveals to us about these questions.

1. **The Old Testament and death**
2. **Where are people who have died and are those people dead?**
3. **Death and Eternity**

## 1. **The Old Testament and death**

From the rituals practiced by people in the Old Testament when death occurred we learn that death was to them a matter of importance. When a loved one died they did many things:

- They tore their clothes and wore mourning.
- They covered their face and head.
- They took off their jewelry and adornments.
- They sprinkled dust and ashes on their head.
- They did not bathe or anoint themselves.
- They fasted or ate very little for a long time.
- They sang laments and made sacrifices.

This could cause us to think that they believed that everything ended with death.

- But that was not the case. They believed in life after death.
- That is the reason why burial was of great meaning to them.

The cremation of corpses was common usage among the nations around Israel, but the Israelites did not have the custom of burning a corpse.

- Burning to death as a penalty is mentioned in some places – Genesis 38:24, Leviticus 20:14 and 21:9 and Joshua 7:15.
- Further the Bible contains only one case where a corpse was burned and that is the one of Saul and his sons whose bodies were burned whereafter their bones were buried. (1 Samuel 31:12+13)

Not to be buried was considered a great shame.

- That is why the Bible always tells emphatically that a person was buried
- In the combat between David and Goliath they taunt each other by saying that he will see to it that the birds and the beasts will eat the other.
- They threaten one another with the prospect of the shame not to be buried. (1 Samuel 17:14-46)
- The curse pronounced over Jerobeam and his descendants was that neither he nor any of his descendants would be buried except for the one child who found favour in the eyes of the Lord. (1 Kings 14:11-13; 16:4; 2 Kings 9:10; Psalm 79:3; Ecclesiastes 6:3; Isaiah 14:19-20)

These statements show clearly that the Lord:

- Wants the believers to be buried.

- Permits only the bodies of unbelievers to lie around in the fields.

An unburied corpse is abhorrent to people.

Spilt blood cries out for vengeance.

- So the Lord confronts Cain: “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.” (Genesis 4:10; 37:26; Job 16:18; Isaiah 26:21; Ezekiel 24:7)
- The reason is that life is in the blood. (Leviticus 17:11)

## 2. Where are people who have died and are those people dead?

One may ask why burial is so important to the Lord. Is it because a person who has died is there where his body is buried and is this one reason?

- The answer is: No. A person who has died is no longer with the living. People who die go to the realm of the dead
- The Hebrew word for the realm of the dead is “Sheol” which means “to bring to finality” or, also, “hang down” or “limp”.
- It is clear from this that at the moment of death the judgment of the Lord separates people.
- All the passages in the Bible in which the realm of the dead is mentioned teach that the people there cannot escape from that which they did when alive.
- Which means that they cannot come to repentance.
- Then it is too late for the unbeliever who died to turn around.

They who do not worship and serve the Lord shall be in hell forever.

- That is the place of which the Bible tells us that it is an inextinguishable fire and where worms eat people but where death cannot bring relief.

The realm of the dead usually means hell.

- The realm of the dead as it is described in the Old Testament is the opposite of life and wealth as we know it on earth.
- In the realm of the dead there is no joy.
- The realm of the dead is synonymous with the grave. (Genesis 37:35)

The realm of the dead is a place from which one normally does not return.

- It is like a city with closed gates. (Psalm 9:13)
- It is a place where one is imprisoned. (Psalm 49:15; Psalm 89:48; Isaiah 24:22)
- *“As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so he who goes down to the grave (sheol) does not return, He will never come to his house again; his place will know him no more”.* (Job 7:9+10)

Where is the realm of the dead? The Bible gives a number of descriptions:

- In the Old Testament the realm of the dead is described as a place deep down in the earth and people descend into it. (Numbers 16:30; Psalm 30:3 and 9; Isaiah 38:18; Psalm 63:9)

Yet there are some places in the Bible where we read of people who were raised from the dead, eg:

1 Kings 17:22:

*“The Lord heard Elijah cry and the boy’s life returned to him and he lived”.*

2 Kings 4:34-35

*“Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy’s body grew warm. Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.”* (Also Job 14:7-12)

The Bible makes us think of the dead as if they were alive.

- There are examples where it is described as if they appear on earth and are recognized by people, eg:
- Samuel called up by the witch of Endor. (1 Samuel 28:14)
- Moses and Elijah on the mount of Transfiguration. (Matthew 17:3)

### **3. Death and Eternity**

The visit by Moses and Elijah changed everything concerned with death for they visited Jesus shortly before the crucifixion to encourage Him. From there Jesus went to Jerusalem to be crucified.

The death on the cross of the Lord and death and the realm of the dead are all connected.

- The death that we die and the realm of the dead are all the result of sin – our sins and the sins of the angels who together with the devil defied God.
- And the realm of the dead is the abode of all who do not serve the Lord with all their heart and conscience.

The death of the Lord Jesus on the cross changed it all – it knocked death off its foundation.

- In Jesus Christ it is revealed that God’s grace is selective. He saves only some.
- Jesus obtained reconciliation for mankind but not for the angels who had sinned.
- They are lost forever.
- The angels who sinned knew this from the beginning that is why they, now known as demons, begged Jesus every time not to punish them before their time.
- In that they referred to their final destination in hell.

On the cross the Lord Jesus removed the reason why God pronounced the sentence of death over mankind.

- He drew onto His Person the wrath of God for our sins.
- On the cross He bore the terrible punishment of God so that the Lord would because of it set us free from eternal death.
- Jesus was not in hell, but He felt the agony of hell in his body and soul. That is why the rocks broke asunder and darkness fell suddenly. Jesus cried out that God had forsaken Him.

All that changed death.

- Now all the Lord’s punishment for our sins is done.
- Now we live eternally with the Lord through the grace of Jesus Christ.

That does not mean that henceforth we live eternally without dying bodily.

- It means that the Lord uses the bodily death as a means of transferring us out of this life to the eternal life.
- The effect of the death on the cross was so powerful that people such as Moses entered the Hereafter centuries before in the power of Jesus.
- And that people such as Elijah and Enoch were taken away to heaven without their body dying and being buried on earth. (Genesis 5:24)

In the New Testament death and what goes with it remains the same as it was in the Old Testament.

- Our bodies still die and are buried.
- Yet there is a greater comfort in our mind than in the minds of the people of the Old Testament for we know more about the Hereafter than they did.

Jesus Christ Himself did this for us.

- He revealed that at their death the true believers are immediately with God in heaven.
- He revealed that in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man where Lazarus at his death was immediately with Abraham in heaven and the rich man at his death immediately was in hell.
- Similarly the robber who was crucified together with the Lord could die with the promise that the same day he would be in heaven with Jesus.

The Lord Jesus did more than that.

- He provided the church as a whole with a large revelation when He revealed the Hereafter to the apostle John.
- John saw there a number of people who had lived on earth – the elders and the souls underneath the altar.
- In another vision John saw all the faithful who had lived on earth, big and small, standing before the Lord.

As far as we, who are still alive, know it is the rule that those who have departed this life for the eternal life, do not return to this life. Except, when the Lord sends them in exceptional cases as He did in days gone by.

What is of importance is that after our earthly bodies have died here on earth we continue to live.

- It is not only in the Old Testament that we find proof of this.
- The New Testament also teaches clearly that people who have died are now living with the Lord.

Death is not inherently eternal.

- Hence, the Lord Jesus Christ arose from the dead.
- The Lord also tells us that the Lord Jesus is going to destroy death finally before He is to hand His kingdom to the Father.

What is the meaning of all this for us?

- It means that every person lives forever.
- Those who truly serve the Lord live in the life hereafter in the kingdom of God.
- There they are perfect and there they will never be subjected to sorrow and troubles.

The Lord comforts us with all these matters from the Bible.

- The purpose of His comfort is that we need not fear the moment of our death.
- We need also not loose heart when a loved one dies.
- Live joyfully towards the hope we have in our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Know that you live eternally.

**Amen**

Closing prayer

Closing Psalm 138:12

Confirmation of elders and deacons

Psalm 134:4

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine on you and be graceful to you.

The Lord lift His countenance to you and give you peace.

Amen

**Dr MJ Du Plessis**  
**Reformed Church Bellville**  
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