

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE – SUNDAY 20 FEBRUARY 2011 – MORNING SERVICE.

Sing beforehand: Psalm 19:4

Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth. Beloved, grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. By the powerful operation of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Psalm of praise 18:11+12

Confession of faith: Apostles Creed

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 Ghost, 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 thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead: I believe in the Holy Ghost: I believe in the holy catholic church: the communion of saints: The forgiveness of sins: 11. The resurrection of the body: And the life everlasting. Amen.

After the law we ask God to forgive our sins with Psalm 19:6.

Law

Psalm 19:6

Prayer

- *Doxology:*
- *Worship:*
- *Confession:*
- *Supplication (for pardon of sins):*
- *Thanksgiving:*
- *Intercession (for the need of the congregation, the church, authorities, sinful world and appeal to the promises of God)*
- *General supplication:*
- *Illumination of the Holy Spirit (necessary for the ministry of the Word):*

Amen.

Psalm 78:1

Scripture reading: Ezekiel 3.

Text: Ezekiel 3:19

“But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself.”

We are responsible for one another! The true believer is subject to a heavy responsibility: he must watch over the life of his neighbour because God shall demand the life of his neighbour from him!

In this sermon we shall consider the following:

1. **Ezekiel and his brief.**
2. **The contents of his brief.**
3. **Where do we fit in?**

1. **Ezekiel and his brief.**

The LORD comes to Ezekiel and instructs him to preach to the Jews who are exiled in Babylon.

- Ezekiel is frail, accordingly the LORD addresses him as “son of man”.
- This form of address underlines that he is only a poor, broken human being – as we are.

It also reveals something else:

- When this feeble and frail man comes to them with his preaching, they must know that it is the LORD that speaks because a man cannot in his frailty say such things.
- This frail man must also bear in mind all the time that he is accountable to his Sender.

The LORD then made him a watchman. There are two kinds of watchmen.

- One is somebody asked to care at night for something, e.g., a flock of sheep belonging to someone else.
- The other is a more important one – somebody appointed to watch over the safety of the city day and night – that was Ezekiel’s duty.

This guard or watchman usually was placed in a high tower on the wall of the city from where he had a good view of the surrounding land.

- His duty was to watch day and night and to sound the alarm whenever he noticed an enemy approaching.
- Ezekiel was appointed to watch over the LORD’s city in this way.

In this simile of a watchman something is left out, because **behind Ezekiel stands the LORD. It is He who is the true Guardian of the city.**

- Ezekiel is made a watchman for the house of Israel but he must bring them the warnings from the LORD.
- All these warnings come from the LORD, all that Ezekiel needs to do is to transmit them to the people. That is all.
- It is not a difficult or perilous task. All he has to do is to say what the LORD says.

The danger is also different from that which ordinarily threatens a city and its inhabitants.

- Ordinarily the enemy attacks from outside – that is why the watchman must look out over the surrounding land.
- But the danger for the people of the LORD does not come from outside. It comes from within: their own sins.

The tension contained in this text lies therein that the LORD appoints Ezekiel as watchman over *Israel*, but he must warn *the wicked*.

- He does not look out from the watch tower over the countryside – no, he looks into the city.
- To us it appears that Israel and the wicked do not fit, yet that is exactly what it is about.
- Within the church of the Lord there are people who do not walk the right path, they are godless and must be warned.

Their sin will cause the wrath of the LORD to erupt and destroy them. The LORD now sends Ezekiel to tell the Israelites that the LORD is angered by their sins and they must repent and turn away from their wickedness.

2. The contents of his brief.

This call concerns the prophet, his Sender and the people to whom he must deliver his message.

- It concerns the prophet because, if he fails to do his work properly, the LORD will punish him.
- The LORD expects of Ezekiel to do his duty with great care.

- He must speak – he may not remain silent out of a sense of shame or from negligence or for whatever reason.

The matter also *concerns the prophet personally* because he fails in his own duty towards his fellow believers, should he remain silent.

- Everybody has a duty towards others to strengthen them in their faith and to rebuke them in love to repent should they fall into sin.
- That is why the LORD tells the prophet that He will hold him accountable for their blood should he fail to warn them about their sin.

It also concerns the LORD – who is his Sender – because the prophet renders the LORD’s Word powerless should he fail to do his duty.

- He is called by the LORD to carry God’s revelation to the people.
- The LORD’s purpose with this revelation is not to punish the people, it is to bring them to repentance and conversion - although Ezekiel must proclaim the LORD’s wrath.

Furthermore it concerns the people of Israel.

- They must know of the LORD’s judgment when they go wrong.
- Should the prophet remain silent he would bring the LORD’s wrath over these people, because, instead of coming to repentance, they would persist in their sin and in that way incur the LORD’s wrath.
- The LORD does not want His people to incur His wrath without prior warning.

The prophet’s brief concerns these godless people within the LORD’s people.

- Those people who live only for themselves and who are very unhappy when life is not to their advantage.
- People who make their own laws and put them above the LORD’s Law.

Such people must be warned.

- They must first hear what the LORD feels about their conduct and then they must be moved to return to the LORD.
- The prophet’s brief *to warn* is in fact nothing else but a *sermon for repentance*.
- It does not matter who the godless person is or what his station in life is.
 - The LORD asks nothing more than a warning!
 - If he then persists in his sin the LORD will punish him.

If he is not warned the LORD will punish him too, but then the Lord will hold the person who should have spoken accountable.

“...and I will hold you accountable for his blood.” (Ezekiel 3:18)

The King James translation reads:

“...but his blood will I require at thine hand.”

It is important to note that the LORD will not hold us accountable if we warn someone and he disregards the warning.

- Verse 19 makes it plain that such a person shall die because of his sin, but the one who warned him shall be saved.

In verse 20 the LORD deals with someone who lives righteously.

- Sometime he loses his way and falls into sin.

- The LORD says that such one will die because of his sins.
- But if he was not warned the LORD will hold him who should have warned him and failed to do so, accountable for his death.
- Not because the one who should have warned him is his redeemer – only because he failed in his duty to admonish him.

The last possibility mentioned by the LORD we find in verse 21:

- If a righteous person is warned not to sin and he heeds the warning,
 - He will live, and
 - The one who warned will also live.
 - Because he has done his duty.

3. Where do we fit in?

On reading these matters one is inclined to think that the LORD speaks to Ezekiel and that it does not concern us at all.

- But it is not true that this passage does not concern us.
- This instruction by the LORD applies to each one of us.

Often we are afraid to speak to people who do and say things that are wrong.

- We may be afraid of losing their friendship.
- Or fear that they may be angry with us.

The difficulty is that we believe that we must convince such people.

- We believe that we must persist until they change their attitude.
- But that is not what the LORD told Ezekiel. The LORD told him that he must warn of what the LORD says. See verse 27:

“But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you shall say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says.’ Whoever will listen let him listen, and whoever will refuse let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house.”

We are not required to fight and argue.

- We must only bear witness.
- The LORD Himself will do the rest.

If we truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ we shall know that we have a cause to bear witness for.

- All people are sinners – and godless.
- Were it otherwise, the Lord did not come to die to atone for people.
- He reconciled us with God – and that is a great cause.
- And all who realize this will want to be witnesses for the Lord in all circumstances.

Our task to bear witness against evil is only a tiny duty compared to the act of redemption – that which our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished.

- The Lord God *died* on the cross.
- On that tree the Lord bore God’s punishment for all my sins – the sins about which Ezekiel was to warn the Israelites.

He also arose from the dead and ascended to heaven to prepare a dwelling where He shall let us live in the Hereafter. In the meanwhile he receives every one of us there when we die.

He now gives us this instruction: go, speak to the people who sin.

- They who persist and those who did live righteously but have now lost the way.

- Some of them will also live in the dwelling that is now being prepared.

The Lord also died for other people who are now living with us.

- We may not know them, but we must bear witness to the salvation in the Lord.
- We must also testify to God's wrath over all people who do not live as redeemed people so that the elect among those around us may be converted.
- We remain each other's keepers.

The ministry of conviction in the hearts of men will be accomplished by the Holy Spirit.

- It is not our task to change the hearts of people.
- Those who wish to refuse to listen and turn away may do so.
- The Lord will deal with them.

What should not happen is that the Lord says to us that He will punish us because people remained unrepentant in their sin because we failed to speak as He commanded us to do.

- We must bear witness and warn – says the Lord.
- We must do so with so much love and conviction that those who do wrong will want to convert and abandon their sin.

The LORD will carry out His Plan – that is certain. But He has rules!

- If we warn and people persist in their sin, the Lord will punish them only.
- If somebody persists in sin and we failed to warn him, he will be punished, but the Lord will hold us accountable for his death.

To bring this matter back to ourselves:

- We are going to celebrate Holy Communion.
- In what condition do we come to the Table of the Lord?
- Are we people who listen when we are spoken to about our sins (godlessness)?

Let us then be true witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ, but also truly converted.

- Speak to people when necessary but also listen when spoken to.
- And when we speak, let us do so quietly and carefully – let only the cause of the Lord be heard.
- And always listen carefully to the voice of the Lord so that we may know when the Lord admonishes us to repent and to conversion to the life eternal.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: Psalm 51:6.

The LORD bless you and keep you;

The LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;

The LORD turn his countenance to you and give you peace.

Amen.

Dr. M.J. du Plessis

Reformed Church Bellville

Date: 20 February 2011

Scripture: NIV (Unless indicated otherwise)