

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 27 JULY 2008: MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 93:4

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 147:4

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 19:7

Law

Psalm: 19:7

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 96:8

Scripture reading: Ezra 10

Scripture text: Ezra 10:11

Now therefore make confession unto Jehovah, the God of your fathers, and do his pleasure; and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the foreign women.

Sometimes dishonesty comes down very heavily on you. Often it is very difficult to rectify the matter afterwards and it is very unpleasant to rectify the things that have gone wrong.

Here we have such a case. When reading it for the first time it seems utterly unbelievable!

- Is it really possible that the Lord can expect from a man to chase away his own wife and children?
- The Lord prohibits divorce and here is not even inkling of saving the marriage, the LORD simply demands that these marriages (some were even successful) be annulled.

Why is the Lord so inexorable about this? This history has been running for hundreds of years.

- When the Israelites entered Canaan the Lord already forbade them marriage with the people of that land.
- The reason being that a man's wife can easily estrange him from his God.

Of this we have many examples in the Bible. One is Solomon.

- With all his wisdom and massive intelligence, in the long run, he was unable to resist his wives and at the end of his life we find him, together with his wives, in the temples of idolatry.
- The Bible teaches that the demise of this man was due to his wives.

With Balaam, we also have seen such an example.

- He could not dare curse the people of Israel but still he advised Balak that the girls of his people should seduce the sons of the Israelites.
- This then happened.
 - The Israelites involved in this crossbreeding were invited to the feasts of Baal-peor.
 - In this way they also became worshippers of this idolatry.
- This angered the Lord and He punished the Israelites with a plague causing the death of 24 000 people.

The principle is very clear:

- Wrong wives open a soft spot in the husband's armour of faith.
- With the right wife his worship can soar to heights – but with the wrong wife his worship may dwindle downwards or even become completely false!
- This is exactly what the Lord wanted to prevent.

This passage of history we have read about of course happened after the banishment.

- A lot of people returned to Palestine.
- They experienced difficult times and had to suffer a lot of pressure and resistance from the people, who in the meantime inhabited their land!

Again the Lord, as in their earlier history, commanded them not to marry the heathen women of the land.

- The people inhabiting the land upon their return were mostly heathens.
- The heathen women seduced the men into not serving the Lord.

As an example we read that Nehemiah (13) who lived in the same times as Ezra, became so angry with the Jewish men because they married heathen wives that he cursed them and plucked off their hair!

- Nehemiah, by example, whilst walking down the street, heard the children playing and talking in the languages of Asdod, Ammon and Moab.
- He tried conversing with them in Hebrew and discovered that they were unable to speak this language.
- Because all scriptures in existence at those times were written in Hebrew and worshipping was done in Hebrew or Aramee, he immediately realised that these children did not know the Bible.
- He was also angry because the Jews forfeited their language to the woman they married.
- *When a man is so weak that he forfeits his language he also forfeits his religion. The people thus sinned against the Lord.*

This matter, in the case of Ezra, was thus very complex:

- Firstly they had a covenant with the Lord not to marry heathen women.
- Secondly in doing so they thereby relinquished their faith and worship to the Lord.
- But in the third instance we also must consider the social implication: they forfeited their culture.

Why did this happen?

- The first answer is simply that the people could not withstand the pressure.
- As a kind of atonement to the hostile heathens, in order to gain their support and favour, they married these heathen women.
- Through this they could easily buy property.

Because the Lord was dissatisfied this attempt dismally failed – He saw it as breach of contract and punished the people.

- He saw it in the light that they preferred the favour of the heathen above the favour of God!
- He expects that when demanding something, the people belonging to Him, at all costs, must comply with this agreement!

The people making this mistake, of all people, were the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin – the people of them who returned.

- Religion leaders led them!
- The people thought that after eighty years the Lord would forget!
- But it was not like that! The Lord still expected it from them!

It is very noteworthy that the people of Judah and Benjamin were involved in this, because at a later stage the Lord Jesus was born from the tribe of Judah. This is because Joseph belonged to the tribe of Judah and Mary belonged to the tribe of Benjamin!

How do you rectify a mistake like this? You already have the wife and your children have already been born!

No matter what had happened, if it is wrong, you have to reform and rectify your mistake! That is all.

- Because of that a meeting of all the people was organised and everybody was present.
- It was a cold rainy day and the sacrifice was large.
- At any rate they appointed people to bring their decisions to conclusion.
- Their decisions entailed sending the alien women and children back to their own people.

This was not done very easily.

- The people worked three months on this task.
- They compiled lists of church leaders, as well as the rest of the people, having heathen wives.
- Each case was individually called up and dealt with.
- All agreed to part with their wives and children.

We must not think that this was without pain and sorrow.

- No man is going to just chase his children away like that.
- Also not his wife!
- They had to go through the proper legal procedures with the chiefs overseeing the matters.

Because right at the start the Lord forbade them to marry these people, they had to choose between sorrow or the wrath of God.

- Now they had to choose: either they persist in an act, prohibited from the start, which was wrong towards the Lord, or they have to endure the grief and rectify the matter.

Here we have the principle of reformation/reform.

- The Lord Jesus, through His conduct, applied this, namely by never allowing nor abandoning something unless it is right in the eyes of God.
- Keep in mind the two instances of Him, purifying the temple.
- His death also was to undo that what was wrong, in other words, to bear the wrath of God for our sins, so that our relation with the Lord could be repaired.

By sending their wives and children back to their heathen families the group of Jews with Ezra suffered heartache only.

- The Lord Jesus, on the other hand, had to give His own life.

This is a great difference and because thereof the results were also different:

- Despite this great effort of reformation the Jews did not better themselves.
- The death of the Lord Jesus is absolutely reconciling to those involved serving to the complete repair of their lives.

Therefore, continually, we are also under the demand of reformation.

- The only difference being that the Jews were granted an opportunity to rectify their mistakes.
- Because we are living in the times of the New Testament we do not have such an opportunity – we already have the beatitude in Christ, and therefore we, at all costs, have to live inside the parameters of this deliverance.

Otherwise, at the judgement, we will experience this pain of being torn away from our people – into the darkness of hell.

- Symbolically we have repentance in the conduct of the men turning to God, even be it accompanied with heartache.
- The wives and children sent back to the heathen forms the symbol of the lost.

Look at the following:

- It means that the lost are trying to rob the believers from their faith.

- And that the believers – even be it with so much pain – have to comply with what the Lord is asking, otherwise later vengeance will be wreaked upon them.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 61:6

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

Summary:

The demands of God, that we have to comply with, never change. Should we be disobedient to it, at a later stage, it will catch up to us. To then repair such transgressions will, most of the times, have massive painful results. Therefore the proper way is that we, like the Lord Jesus Himself, must do as absolutely as possible, the proper things and not, in aid of anything, transgress the rules of the Lord.