

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 22 JUNE 2008: EVENING SERVICE (Part 2 of 2 parts)

Sing before: Psalm 144:1

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: 103:9

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 119:34

Scripture: Galatians 4

Text: Galatians 4:30

But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave-woman and her son; for in no way shall the son of the slave-woman inherit with the son of the free woman."

The proof that external worship is wrong

In our times all sorts of heathenish practises, strange to the church, are suddenly introduced.

- These for example, are things like the lighting and burning of candles during confession of faith.
- All sorts of external ceremonies, having for those practising them, nearly as much power as the revelation of the Lord.

In our times, worshipping has become dreadfully exterior. How do we know that it is wrong? The apostle Paul quotes proof from the Bible that exterior things in worshipping do not determine our salvation. He is referring to Genesis 16 and 21.

There the Lord showed in history and practically, the difference between the two groups of people.

- Abraham had two sons.
- The name of the eldest was Ishmael and the other was called Isaac.
- But although they had the same father, there was a large amount of difference between the two sons. They stood in sharp contrast against each other.
 - Ishmael representing the line running since Cain through the people – it is the line of disbelief and of the antichrist.

Isaac representing the covenant line - the believers or predestined.

These two lines also are in constant conflict with each other.

- This conflict immediately starts with Ishmael and Isaac: Ishmael persecutes Isaac.
- Genesis 21:9 describes Sarah seeing that Ishmael is mocking Isaac.
 - She then approached Abraham saying textually precisely what is written in our text (this also is the text of Paul's sermon!):
Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this handmaid and her son. For the son of this handmaid shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac (Genesis 21:10)

Ishmael, in fact, was the eldest son of Abraham.

- As it was the tradition of his time, he may even have hoped to be eligible to the blessing of the first-borne!
- His mocking thus would have been about this, therefore Sarah insisted that he should inherit nothing.

Before Paul continues with this history he enquires from the readers of his letter why they, who want to be under the law, not want to listen to the law.

- In those times the first five books of the Bible were called the law and it to this that Paul is referring. (Sometimes only the Ten Commandments are meant when referring to the law and once, in John 10:34,35, the complete Old Testament was meant.)
- Paul also emphasised the divine power of the Bible by saying: Because there is written...
 - People cannot question that which the Lord caused to be written down.

The Lord caused to be written down that Abraham had two sons: The one born out of the handmaiden. The other born out of the freewoman.

- The covenant and predestination is clearly put into contrast with the rejection: Between belief and disbelief.
- The crux of this matter: what the Lord is doing with people

Therefore is not written here that the one son was born out of Hagar and the other son out of Sarah.

- It is not dealing with the mothers
- It is dealing with the position the two sons occupied before God.
- Verse 24 clearly states that, because it is dealing with two covenants, it is an allegory.

Each of the women represents a specific state or condition in the eyes of the Lord. It also typifies the character of their children.

- The one is a slave; thus sinful.
 - He is addicted to unrighteousness.
- The other has been sanctified by the covenant, therefore he is free.
 - The Lord has freed him from exterior things.

The Lord Jesus redeemed this child who was born out of the freewoman

- This was addressed already during the offering on Moria when the Lord forbade Abraham to kill Isaac and a ram was offered in his place.
- Here his freedom is clearly shown.
 - He is free from death.
 - Indeed freed from sin, because in his place was an alternative offer.

These things also have a meaning to us, because in the New Testament the Lord Jesus Christ says that not everybody from Israel is Israel.

- We know that with this He means that the Israelites should not think that because they descend from Abraham, all of them would be taken into the Kingdom of God.

- We also know that herewith the Lord Jesus is saying to the church of the New Testament that they should not think that they, just because they are belonging to a church, would be redeemed.
- It all depends on how you are belonging to that church.

Abraham fathered two sons. But because they reacted differently to their childhood, the Lord did not treat them equally.

- Ishmael was a slave and he was also enslaved to exterior serviceability.
- In Christ, Isaac was free.

Verse 23 tells that this difference started at the origin of these two boys. This is also true. Just read Genesis 16.

- Ishmael is born after the flesh.
 - Sarah approached Abraham requesting that he fathered a child by her handmaiden.
 - Abraham then fathered a child by the Egyptian slave.
 - When Hagar found that she was pregnant, she started despising Sarah.

The Ten Commandments do teach that the Lord will visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate Him.

- Therefore it can be barely expected that something good might happen to this son of the Egyptian handmaiden.
- His life also proved that he continued living in the sin he was begotten into.

The second son was not planned like the first.

- He was promised by the Lord. Sarah was already 93 years of age and Abraham was 100 years old.
- It is quite possible that you, like Sarah (and Abraham), would have laughed, if at that age, a complete stranger told you that you would bear a child.

But exactly this underlined the fact that the birth of this child was due to the work of the Lord alone. The Bible also underlines this in other passages, for example Romans 4:19; Genesis 19:13.

Note the meaning of this: No human decision played any part in the coming of this child.

- God decided that Isaac had to be born and He brings him into the world.
- Because of that Isaac is out of the free woman. Free in the Mercy of God, just like his birth was as well.

These two boys depict the people and the church.

- We were all born under the covenant and we all say that we believe.
- But amongst us there are those putting themselves, in a very delicate and often sly way, against the freedom in Christ – like Ishmael.

With his mocking and self-righteousness he contemptuously denied the freeborn his place.

- With that he moved completely outside his own boundaries.
- Thus it could not be otherwise, he had to be punished.

You will, should you pay close attention, see the same amongst the believers:

- There are those worshipping the Lord in such a way that they enslave the Lord to amplify their own importance.
 - They become more and God less.
- Other parishioners worship the Lord in such a way that they continually become less and the Lord more. Free from own importance.

Verse 24 put it that Ishmael is like mount Sinai.

- Here they received the law
- The Ten Commandments, in fact, enslaved the people:
 - Thou shalt not kill!
 - Thou shalt not commit adultery!
 - Thou shalt not steal!
 - Honour thy father and thy mother!

Under this covenant exists compulsory submissiveness to gain your redemption by your own obedience.

Verse 26 sets the contrast to verse 24:

- Jerusalem is above!
 - Not enslaved!
 - Free in Jesus Christ!

Only those infused by the Spirit of God are free!

- They are expecting to receive the mercy of God.
- They are free because they are expecting the Lord to commiserate Himself, through Christ, over them.

The others are standing under themselves.

- Their own power and self-righteousness dictates how they want to live.
- They are enslaved to the world and themselves and are lost.

Verse 28 directly applies to us: Although we are not Jews, we became children of the covenant.

- In order to make the full community we have with God detectable, the Bible calls us **brothers** – it goes without saying that the sisters are also included herewith.
- What the Lord is revealing here is that just like Isaac was born through the working of God only, we are sharing in Christ.

Now we are faced with the massive responsibility that, as Isaac, we have to be free: Free in Jesus Christ. Strong in the Lord, and by Jesus Christ, made conquerors over evil.

All of those amongst us thinking that they, through their own importance, or by good deeds or meritoriously will be sanctified, must realise that they will be rejected by the Lord.

- In this Bible passage such people are referred to as “children of the slave”
- Because they are standing in their own power, they are standing outside of the covenant of mercy.

Jesus Christ was not planned by the will or decision of mankind. He enters our world like Isaac: purely by the will of God.

- In this He also is the fulfilment of the promises prophetically embodied in the person of Isaac.
- He is God coming to this earth for the reverence and glorification of God and, out of free will, doing redemption work for all predestined and freed by Him from death.

Jesus Christ never enslaved Himself to the law. Therefore He and the Pharisees collided with each other.

- The life of Jesus was completely aimed towards the glory of God, whilst with the Pharisees it was all about themselves.

- Because of that He was able to tell the Pharisees that it was not the exterior of the worshipping that mattered but in fact, the interior.

To corroborate His sermons Jesus went and died on the cross.

- He did not die for his own glory, but died for the Glory of God because his death confirmed the grace of God over us. For this the Lord earns to be glorified.
- Also He died for the glory of the predestined because we are, without glory in our sins, facing God and because He atoned for our sins, He grants us glory.
- By reconciling us with God, He restores our glory.

Never once on the cross or during His life did the Lord give preference to his own desires. He also never demanded anything for Himself.

Look at the freeness God uses in this deed of redemption.

- Out of free will He promised a Saviour because nobody can dictate to God for the provision of a Saviour.
- The Lord Himself executed this saviour deed –
 - Jesus was born by the free will of God.
 - Out of free will He went to the cross, nobody forced Him.
 - He rose from death out of own choice.
 - Out of own choice He caused the descent of the Holy Spirit over the church.

God's power is free to redeem whomever He wants, and to exceed over the power of hell without anything or anybody being able to prevent Him.

Let us test ourselves to the conduct and nature of Ishmael:

- Are we free in the Lord to be able to be ourselves? Or are we enslaved to sinful things like haughtiness?
- Does your status decide over your conduct, or whether we are obedient to the Lord?
- Does your selfishness decide on the amount of love towards others or do we have the ability to render unconditional love to all because the Lord freed us from the constraints of this life?
- Do we really serve the Lord, or are we addicted to our own snobbishness causing all sorts of restraints over us?

If it as such, then you are not freed by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Then you are still, like Ishmael, entwined in yourself and between the narrow borders of this world!
- Then you are trying to play God in determining the borders of your salvation.
- You are then pretending to be like God to judge who will be in heaven and who not.

Such people do not inherit with the freed, because they are enslaving the plan of God to mankind.

- They try binding God to things important to them in this life.
- Remember that God is omnipotent. He is completely free in all His decisions.
- In this judgement right belonging to Him, He also built in a criterium that can be used to judge yourself!
- You can determine whether you are enslaved to this life or whether you are free in Jesus to not follow this life, but to proceed to eternal life.

Amen

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 121:1

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