

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 7 NOVEMBER 2010: MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 4:3.

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

Song of praise: Psalm 31:15

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 universal 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 51:4.

Law

Psalm: 51:4

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 119:29

Scripture reading: Genesis 38

Text: Genesis 38: 25: **As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. “I am pregnant by the man who owns these,” she said. And she added, “See if you recognise whose seal and cord and staff these are.”**

Martin Luther, on reading this chapter, asked in amazement why God the Holy Spirit let such a disgraceful chapter be recorded in the Bible.

- After the great Reformer had struggled with this matter, he concluded that God let it be done to teach us that nobody can be proud of his own wisdom and righteousness because that would be audacious.
- And also so that nobody would in the magnitude of his sin need to despair – there is forgiveness.

But that is not all. This passage in the Bible contains a powerful piece of God’s revelation.

- We are shown the corrupting influence the heathen nations around them had on Israel.
- The Lord indicates here that his people must be set apart so that their religion be preserved, for among the other nations they will lose it because all kinds of iniquitous things would be added.

In the revelatory history of Joseph we learn that the Lord used him to bring to Egypt the people of Israel, who at that stage were only a large family.

- The question arises why the chosen people of God had to go to live among the Egyptians.
- In this passage we learn the reason.

There are some matters in chapter 38 that stand out.

- Firstly, that these events occur after Joseph was sold.
 - They happened while he was in Egypt, while imprisoned and when he was governor.
 - The famine also occurred in this period.
- Secondly, the fact that Judah no longer lives with his father.
 - He has exchanged the house of his father for the company of the Caananites.
 - He has befriended a man called Hirah – a man who probably was not a good influence.
- Thirdly, Judah has lost contact with his religion.
 - He marries a Caananite woman, the daughter of a man named Shua.
 - Three sons are born of this union – Er, Onan and Shelah.

Following the customs of the Caananites, Judah got a wife for his son Er. Tamar, also a Caananite.

- The religious education of Judah’s children is poor.
- We read that Er, his eldest son, displeased the Lord.

We are not told what his sin was.

- We can draw our inferences but there is no certainty. The fact is that his life was so sinful that the Lord put him to death.
- He leaves no son to carry his name forward.

In those days that was a serious matter because the deceased’s property falls vacant.

- If there is no son the property goes to strangers.
- And the family dies out.

That is why we read of the Levirate marriage in the laws of Moses (Deuteronomy 25:5-10)

- The widow becomes the wife of the other brother and the first son she bears carries on the name of the dead brother, her first husband.
- In this way the name is carried forward.

In the passage we have read this happens also.

- Judah tells his son Onan to take Tamar for his wife.
- The marriage would be in order as she had no son.

It was permissible for a brother to refuse such marriage.

- But Onan does not refuse it.
- He agrees to take Tamar but he refuses to impregnate her.
- He uses her body but refuses to do his duty by her.

This was wicked in the Lord's sight.

- Onan knew that any son Tamar bore would not be his, but carry his brother's name and that he did not want.
- The Lord then put him to death also.
 - It was not a natural death
 - It was the punishment for his sin.

We then see the danger in Judah's conduct.

- His life among the Caananites has led him to believing other things that what is right.
- According to law he should let his youngest son marry Tamar.
 - But this Judah does not want to do – he is superstitious.
 - He believes that something is the matter with Tamar – that is why she has caused his other two sons to die.

Bearing all this in mind, Judah does Tamar a great injustice.

- He promises her his youngest son in marriage – but later. The boy is still too young.

There is more to this than meets the eye.

- It meant that Tamar was betrothed to Shelah – she would then be considered as being a married woman although a widow.
- She may then wear only widow's weeds and must live in her father's house.
- And she cannot marry another man.

To Tamar this was a heavy burden.

- It soon became clear to her that she would remain childless and unmarried because Shelah had in the meanwhile grown up but she had not become his wife.

Tamar did not wish to marry just to satisfy her bodily desires.

- She had a different desire – she wanted to be incorporated into the chosen people.
- That was her only reason for having a son.
- She apparently had a good understanding of the religion of Jacob and his household.

But Tamar also understood her father-in-law well:

- He was a man with a reputation and also no longer practised his Israelite religion purely.

- She therefore follows the religion of the Canaanites – she does two things that are part of it:
 - She disguises herself as a temple prostitute – in those days there were many.
 - They worshipped Asherah, the goddess of fertility
 - The second is that the Canaanites also knew a Levirate marriage but carried it further than the Israelites.
 - They included the father-in-law should he not have other sons to marry the widow.
 - Hence Tamar intends to include Judah.

Meanwhile Tamar's mother-in-law dies and her father-in-law is a widower.

- She also learns that he is to attend the shearing of his sheep.
- Which means that Judah will be in a festive mood, because the shearing was a festive occasion – and the wine would flow to strengthen the shearers.

Tamar takes off her widow's clothing and disguises herself as a temple prostitute. She waits on the road Judah is to take.

We now get to know Judah in his weakness.

- He falls into the trap set for him.
- Tamar is clever enough to demand a pledge from him.

She knew that the punishment for such a trespass by a widow was death.

- She would first be stoned to death and thereafter her body would be burnt.
- She also knew that according to law her father-in-law had to pronounce the verdict.
- She also knew that if the man who had sinned with her was known, he would die with her.

For that purpose she demanded Judah's seal and its cord and his staff.

- To a Canaanite these were his most prized possessions.
- Without them he was an object of ridicule.

The matter became known and Judah is informed that his daughter-in-law is pregnant.

- He takes the opportunity to rid him of her.
- Without hesitation he orders her to be put to death.

The moment of truth arrives.

- Tamar is taken out of the town to be killed.
- All the people are gathered because they must do the stoning.
- Judah is there too – as judge he must execute the punishment.

Then Tamar produces the pledge.

- Being a woman, and a condemned one too, she was not permitted to speak but she had an advocate with her
- At this tense and critical moment he shows the seal and its cord and the staff to Judah in the presence of all the people.
- He hands them to Judah and tells him that they belong to the father of her child.

You can imagine, beloved, all the people coming closer to see who the man is. Because he will now have to be taken out to be put to death with Tamar.

Then the shock. The pledge belongs to Judah!

- He could probably have died of shame because it suddenly is revealed to all that he secretly committed adultery whereas he should have behaved himself as a widower.
- The whole story of his affair with the prostitute after the shearing is now public knowledge.
- He now had to explain and Tamar probably also had an opportunity to have her say.

Judah then confesses his sins: he has done Tamar a great injustice.

- Everybody now understands why Tamar acted as she did: she wanted to make it known how she was wronged.
- Because of her intentions the punishment was not executed.

Thereafter Tamar lived in Judah's house but he did not sleep with her again.

- From this union twins were born.
- One of them was Perez, an ancestor of David and so also of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This passage tells us of God's will regarding the suffering and the humiliation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- We confess in the Heidelberg Catechism that Christ's descent into hell was his entire suffering throughout his life with the deepest point being his last moments on the cross.
- We find the beginning thereof with Tamar.
 - It is the will of God that Christ be born out of the tribe of Judah.
 - Judah had other sons and grand-sons – but God willed it that He be born out of Perez who was begotten incestuously and in prostitution.
 - It is part of Christ's humiliation that He comes from a bad family.

The worst disgraces are to be found in the people whose names appear in His genealogy.

- Together with Tamar we can mention three other women of similar nature:
 - Rahab the prostitute,
 - Ruth who also entered a Levirate marriage, and
 - Bathsheba who committed adultery with David who subsequently had her husband murdered to cover up their shame.
- We therefore learn here a great truth:
 - Nobody has any cause for boasting. We all have the life of a Judah or a Tamar.
 - On the other hand we need not drown in the realization of the magnitude of our sins.
 - No, as there was forgiveness for Judah for his iniquity and for Tamar delivery from death, and for her children, it was precisely out of that, that salvation came for us.
 - Out of this saved generation the Christ was born who had to suffer untold sorrow and loneliness and death for our salvation.

Immediately after the birth of Tamar's twins Judah left the Caananites to rejoin Jacob and his family.

- Then came the famine and the purchase of corn and the move to Egypt.
- The Lord teaches us here that we cannot boast in our own power.
- Each one of us has hands black with sin
 - But that does not mean that we are lost
 - God is merciful and when we repent He forgives us our sins.

But there is more.

- Guard against the company of people who will alienate you from God.
- People who will teach you all sorts of habits that close your eyes to sin so that you will eventually participate without noticing it or being troubled by your sinning.

The first Christians instituted Christmas and chose 25 December because that was the date on which the heathen Greeks celebrated the feast of the sun.

- This feast consisted mainly of outrageous sins.
- With the celebration of this worldly xmas we Christians are missing the true Christmas.
- We make of it a day of pleasure, presents, drunkenness and worldly joy.

Whereas, in truth, the true Christmas was a day of Tamar – a day of untold sorrow.

- The Son of God came into the world while, before His birth, He was already disqualified by the world.
- Firstly His family and genealogy counted against Him
 - Nobody wanted a Christ born out of a generation of despised prostitutes and fraudsters.
 - The world wanted a glorious Christ – as we wrongly celebrate Christmas.
- There were only a few animals around Christ to bring Him homage as the Son of God when He was born. The crowds of the world were absent. It was a moment of sorrow – a moment of Tamar. They, for whose salvation He had come, were all absent.

In secret the Lord Jesus receives a visit to honour Him from the Eastern Magi.

- It must be kept secret because, should this mark of esteem become known, the Son of the Most High would die. Another moment of Tamar.
- Then the shepherds arrive. The simple people. They who come in poverty and want. Poor.

These disgraces of the world that would be saved by Son of God are much greater than the sins of Tamar and Judah.

- It is a much darker occurrence.
- And this Child must flee to the heathens in Egypt to save His life because those for whom He came, will kill all the children to ensure His death.

Expect Christ now with fear and trepidation, for now He no longer is the Man of sorrows.

- Now He is God who in His glory rules life and death.
- Now He is the God of judgement. His ministry of love is completed.

When He comes this time, He comes on the clouds to judge everyone and his work.

- To gather around Him those who believe and repent their unrighteousness.
- To put before God with joy those who are grateful that He was so humiliated as to be born out of Tamar the adulteress, to bear with it the curse of God that should rest on us.

Do not boast of being without sin, it is false.

- We all live like Tamar and Judah.
- But, like them, we must not remain in our sins. We must with remorse and repentance get out of them.

The Lord Jesus Christ was humiliated like this before His birth precisely so that for all of us there would be exoneration and forgiveness of all those and similar sins.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing song: Psalm: 18:11.

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face towards you and give you peace.

Amen

Dr MJ Du Plessis

Reformed Church Bellville

7 November 2010 song:

Scripture Modern King James Version