

## REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 31 MAY 2009: EVENING SERVICE

**Sing before:** Psalm 27:3

*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**

Psalm of praise: Psalm 31:17

**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 86:8

**Scripture reading:** 1 Samuel 15:11, 29; Isaiah 38

**Scripture text:** Isaiah 38:1, 5

**“In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, “This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.” (verse 1)**

**“Go and tell Hezekiah, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life.’” (verse 5)**

In the antique heathendom much store was set by mankind's own abilities.

- Man's wit and the measure to which his spirit or mind had developed or his artistic gifts determined the decisions he took in life.
- These cultured people determined what and how the religion of the time would be and they invented the gods and how these idols were to be worshipped.
- And now we find, curiously, that these things are repeating themselves and that even in the Christian religion we see it happening.

In this sermon we consider the providence of the Lord and His relationship with creation – and particularly His relationship with mankind. We examine the following:

1. The unlimited power of God.
2. God's righteousness.
3. Our trust in His Fatherly love.

### 1. The unlimited power of God.

No power can resist the Lord.

- The Lord is so powerful that He not only rules everything that exists, but He even determines everything that happens to everything in creation.
- The Lord Jesus teaches us that the hairs on our head are all counted, and that not even a sparrow dies unless God the Father determined it to happen.

Where in the present day postmodernism man and what he decides and thinks is more and more important we must turn to the Bible and see what it teaches about the way in which the Lord rules mankind with absolute power.

- Some people He blesses without them having done anything in particular to merit it.
- Others He punishes without it appearing that they have done anything wrong.
- The Bible teaches us that God makes people whom He loves and others He makes for perdition and keeps them for His judgement. Romans 9:22: **What if God, choosing to show His wrath and make His power known, bore with great patience the objects of His wrath – prepared for destruction?**

Let us look at some examples from the Bible:

- When the Lord called Moses He told him that He would harden Pharaoh's heart so that He could work miracles in Egypt:- Exodus 7:3: **But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply My miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt ...**
- Moses then went to Egypt and there the Lord spoke to him again and told him that He had now hardened Pharaoh's heart – Exodus 10:1:- **Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these miraculous signs of mine among them ...**
- In Romans 9:17 the Lord provides a retrospect on this history. He reveals that He hardened the heart of Pharaoh so that in Pharaoh He could show His power and proclaim His Name in all the earth – **For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display My power in you and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth."**

Man cannot lie to God or make Him change His decisions.

- In the narration of Achan (Joshua 7) the Lord reveals that He rules over the sins of men and that He shall destroy them when they lie to Him.
- With it God at the same time causes other people to fear and respect Him.
- One could argue that these people were bad and unbelieving and that this was why the Lord destroyed them – but what about Judas and the Jews who crucified the Lord Jesus?

The Lord did the same when He wanted to punish Absalom:

- Ahithophel and Hushai had both advised him – Ahithophel’s advice was good and correct and Hushai’s advice was bad.
- We then read in the Bible: **Absalom and all the men said, “The advice of Hushai the Arkite is better than that of Ahithophel.” For the LORD had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom. (2 Samuel 17:14)**

We find something similar in the account of Rehoboam when the realm split in two.

- The wise counsellors gave him good advice but he preferred to follow the advice of his friends.
- He took this decision by himself, yet it is written in the Bible that it was from the LORD - **So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the LORD, to fulfil the word the LORD had spoken to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah the Shilonite. (1 Kings 12:15)**

In **2 Chronicles 21:16-17** it is written that the LORD aroused two heathen nations, the Philistines and the Arabs, to attack Judah. This the LORD did to punish Judah:-

**The LORD aroused against Jehoram the hostility of the Philistines and the Arabs who lived near the Cushites. They attacked Judah, invaded it and carried off all the goods found in the king’s palace, together with his sons and wives. Not a son was left to him except Ahaziah, the youngest.**

A quite different example we find in **Romans 1:24 and 28**:

**Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. (verse 24)**

**Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. (28)**

- In this passage the Lord reveals that He gives bad people over to their urges so that they might become impure.
- Then He punishes them for the sins they commit. One becomes afraid on reading in 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 that the Lord sends a powerful delusion to certain people so that they will believe the lie.
- And then God shall judge them because they failed to believe the truth:- **For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. (2 Thes 2:11-12)**

There are many more such examples to be found in the Bible,

- But the important point that appears clearly from them all is that God controls completely the life of every person.
- In some people He works to change them to His pleasure and others He allows to fall into sin so that He might judge (condemn) them.

## 2. God’s righteousness.

What are we to say about all these examples in the Bible that we have mentioned? This:

- God does not allow Himself to be ruled or dominated by the thoughts or insights of people.
- Also He does not allow Himself to be dominated by so-called clever people.
- He chooses weak and terribly miserable people and in His grace He saves them and sanctifies them.

But is this not unjust?

- No. In His righteousness God determined a number of people to live who would sometime be saved.
- And who would be sanctified, and He determined other people to live who would not be saved.
- And whom He would keep for hell.

We have taken a few examples from the Bible from which it appears clearly that those people executed God's Counsel precisely and yet were punished.

- But we cannot deny that these people did exercise their own choice.
- They decided themselves what they wanted to do, such as Rehoboam, and were therefore justly punished by the Lord.

Just as the predestination God's Counsel has two sides to it and two participants.

- Hence man cannot reproach the Lord when the Lord punishes him for his sins.
- As long as we remember that both parties always execute the will of God.

Not one of us will in this life be able to comprehend this.

- There are various reasons why we are unable to understand it, such as the fact that we are born in sin and have incomplete insight with which to consider the Counsel of the LORD.
- In addition mankind suffers from the sin of conceit.
- This is the sin with which satan brought us down – you will be like God!
- The effect of this sin is that there are many people who approach the Bible with their own prescriptions.
- They put demands to the Lord with which He must comply, failing which He is unjust.
- Such people are not believers. However harsh it may appear, only true believers are able to accept these matters and know that God is just when He does these things.

It remains an undeniable fact that all people are conceived and born in sin and that all are unrighteous.

- Not a single one among us is righteous
- All people who are subjected to the punishment of God therefore suffer it because they deserved it.

**Those who are saved, are saved only by virtue of God's mercy shown them in Jesus Christ.**

**While those who are lost, are lost because of their sins and the wrong done by them.**

### **3. Our trust in His Fatherly love.**

If, when reading all these matters in the Bible, we were to be unbelievers, it would drive us crazy. For it appears as if the Lord is so harsh and unapproachable. But that is not so. The Lord is very mild and concerned in His love for all people, but especially for the faithful.

Let us look at some examples recorded for us in the Bible. In the passage we have read Hezekiah is terminally ill (2 Kings 20:1-5).

- This was not an ordinary illness, it was an illness the Lord brought onto Hezekiah On the one hand to test his faith
- On the other hand the Lord wished to use the illness to show His love for this king.

The Lord sends the prophet Isaiah to Hezekiah to tell him that the Lord is going to let him die.

- Hezekiah was very upset at this message and prayed fervently, wept and implored the Lord for mercy
- Isaiah had hardly left the palace when the Lord sent him back to tell Hezekiah that the Lord granted him a further fifteen years of life.

Read superficially it would appear as if the Lord is willing to change His Counsel for the sake of the believers.

- But the Lord never alters His Counsel – the Lord used this message by Isaiah to reveal His love for Hezekiah.
- The Lord also wanted to assure him that He heard his prayer when he prayed.

There are more passages in the Bible which create the impression that the Lord is willing to alter His Counsel should people repent.

- Think of Jeremiah 18:8 where the Lord says that He will relent if Israel repents of its evil – **And if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.**
- The Lord knew that they would not repent and that is why they were eventually sent into exile as punishment.
- But He wished to make it plain that in His love He is so pliable that He would have altered His Plan if they were to come to repentance.

There is a place where the Lord appears to have changed His Plan and absolved people whom He had planned to destroy.

- It is the narration of Nineveh as recorded in Jonah 3: 4-10.
- Jonah preached that, unless they repented the Lord would destroy the city, whereupon they did repent and the city was not destroyed.

The Lord did not change His Plan because the repentance in Nineveh was of short duration wherefore they fell back into heathendom.

- That is why the Lord later destroyed the city and its people as He said in the beginning because unrepentant people cannot lay claim to the love of Lord.

When Samuel had to tell Saul that the Lord was to take his kingship away from him the Lord said that He was grieved that He had made Saul king

- The Lord was grieved (NIV) or greatly regretted (New King James) - 1 Samuel 15:11
- The Lord's grief (regret) is not the same as our grief (regret).

We regret (grieve) when we are sorry about a mistake we made and we then resolve to correct it by repenting.

- The Lord's regret (grief) is entirely different.
- It is the deep sorrow the Lord feels when His elect fall into unbelief.
- It is a word, which expresses that the Lord is concerned about us and that in His love He is pained when we reject Him.

Isaiah 14:27 puts it beyond doubt that the Lord never changes His mind but this does not mean that the Lord is cold and without feeling and is far away from us.

- All those passages in which the Lord's grief is mentioned only say that in His Fatherly love the Lord remains tender and close to us.
- The Lord's concern is also confirmed by the fact that in His Counsel He determined that His Son must die so that we may live.

He also shows it prophetically in history, for example, in the deluge.

- The Lord expresses His sorrow for our sins – Genesis 6.6: **The LORD was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and His heart was filled with pain.**
- Here too the Lord says that He is grieved that He made people and that He is going to destroy them – but read carefully, **the Lord does not regret the fact that He made people,**

What grieves Him is the fact they do not serve Him and have become complete sinners.

- For this reason He does not destroy all the people
- He destroyed only the sinners and saved eight believers. The formular for baptism teaches that in that act the Lord gave a pointer towards the baptism in the blood of Jesus Christ.

The Christ had to die for many reasons:

- Usually we remember that the Lord sent His Son to die for us so that we might be redeemed from His punishment.
- But his Son also died to confirm the absolute immutability of God's Counsel
- As God made His Plan known at creation, so He executes it unto eternity.

Jesus also died to reveal God's rule over mankind:

- The Lord saves whom He wills and the rest He allows to go into perdition because they do not worship Him as He commanded them to do.
- As against those who are lost the atoning death of our Lord Jesus confirms that the fatherly love of God the Father for us who believe, will continue undiminished until He resettles us in His eternal kingdom.

**Amen.**

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 98:2

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  
31 May 2009  
Scripture: New International Version**