

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 20 JULY 2008: MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 95:5

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 32:6

Confession of faith: Nicene

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was Incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.

And we believe one holy catholic* and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 40:4

Law

Psalm: 40:4

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 59:10

Scripture reading: James 1

Scripture text: James 1:18

Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

It of course cannot happen that the Lord tempts people. Therefore the Bible clearly defines between tribulation and temptation.

- The Lord tests the faith of people.
- But the devil tempts people.
- The Lord never tempts people.

The matter is thus easy and clear: tribulation originates from the Lord and a temptation comes from Satan and sin.

We look at the following attributes of true faith:

1. **Who all are going to experience tribulations and what are tribulations?**
2. **Characteristics of a true believer and his faith.**

1. **Who all are going to experience tribulations and what are tribulations?**

To be able to understand this letter we, amongst others, must know who the author of this James-letter is.

- This James is not the apostle James, brother of John, one of the two sons of Zebedee.
- This James is a brother of the Lord Jesus.

Therefore it is touching that he introduces himself as a slave to God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- He fully submits himself surrendering to Jesus.
- This letter very clearly shows that with this letter, as also is the case with his whole life, he is not seeking glory for himself.

The implication of this introduction is that the readers must realise that the guidelines and admonitions set in this letter must be accepted because all the guidelines are given in service to his Lord.

- The impact is massive, especially as it is given by a man who himself has gone through temptations: In the beginning he did not believe in Jesus.
- The Bible tells us that the family of Jesus rejected Him in the beginning.
- As this man later during his life, conquered the temptation of disbelief and the rejection of his Brother as the Messiah, he now can, as a believer, write to the church of the Lord.

This letter is written to the twelve tribes of Israel who are in dispersion.

- To the twelve tribes means to the church in fullness.
 - **Dispersion** shows that the true believers are scattered all over the world.
 - It points towards the new Israel – the Christianity. (Compare to Acts 1:8; 11:19). The church of the Lord that eventually will reside upon the new earth.
- Furthermore it is important to note that chapter 1:1 and 2:1 supposes that the readers of this letter are fully conversant with the work of the lord Jesus Christ as well as what it means to the believers.

In the first part of his letter James is dealing with the steadfastness and faith, which the true believer has to use dealing with temptations.

- There is a paradox in the second verse: **Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations.**
- This is the first characteristic of true faith.

Why must we have joy in things that hurt?

- The answer is that many times temptation causes your faith to become clearer and deepens your insight.
- The Lord allows Satan to tempt people in aid of testing and purifying their faith.

First we must have clarity about what temptation is.

- Temptation is anything used by the devil wanting to hurt you or damage your relation with the Lord.
- Anything can be a temptation, from poverty and disease, to wealth and prosperity. Such afflictions often threaten Christians with falling into sin.
- The mercy lies in that Satan is, unless explicitly allowed by the Lord, unable to achieve success.

Such faith can eventually persevere into true faith.

- Perseverance is a gift of God.
- Satan therefore does not leave this gift alone: through sin he attacks our perseverance.

But perseverance has to work till the end and must lead your faith to a zenith.

- Here it does not entail earthly perfection but spiritual and moral perfection.
- Is a human able to already reach this perfection during this life?
- It sounds highly impossible that this may happen, but the Bible has examples of such humans – think about Henoah and Eliah.

2. Characteristics of a true believer and his faith.

Wisdom is needed in order to withstand temptations.

- Wisdom is the ability to, under certain circumstances, use your knowledge in order to act in the proper way.
- God, without any problem, grants wisdom to all that truly desires it and asks it from Him.

Such as the mercy of God is, such the road of mercy is depicted forward – He simply without reproach, grants.

- The Lord sets no conditions for Him receiving anything in exchange.
- He does not even reproach us for losing the wisdom that we had through falling in sin.
- Neither does he reproach us about all the stupidity of the past.

The person praying must not be **troubled by any desperation**. This passage underlines the persuasion with which one must pray.

- It may easily happen that you pray with your mouth, in other words your body is present speaking to the Lord but your heart is not in it.

- Prayer signifies faith because where faith is absent there is no trust. (thus: if is not from the heart).

Verse 7 gives a second reason why, when somebody does not pray in faith, nothing is received from the Lord.

- It stands to reason that when faith is absent there is no communion between God and the person praying.
- Doubt is seen as such that the person praying with doubt possibly also is not attaching any value to the prayer.
- Even should a doubtful be in contact with God through his prayer he still is of two minds because he is not really convinced of the reason why he is praying.
- Therefore the Lord says: for he that doubteth is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed – he is completely without direction.

The next characteristic of true faith is described in verses 9 and 10.

- There must be **no sign of haughtiness**.
- The bible describes this in a very interesting way: But let the brother of low degree glory in his high estate.
 - The word used here is not *humble* in comparison with *pride* or *haughtiness*. Literary the word means *low* or *small* or *down to earth*.

This is why it is translated as: **But let the brother of low degree glory in his high estate.**
(James 1:9)

Of course these verses have a double meaning.

- The first is the literary.
 - This is how the Lord sees us: we are insignificantly small and we have to be glad about that.
 - Therefore here is written that the small man must glory in his high estate.
 - It means that he must be glad to be so insignificant in the eyes of the Lord because then there would be mercy for him.

Immediately it is added that the rich must also glory in that he is made low.

- Clearly this means that the Lord is looking at the esteem of the rich man and not at the size of his wallet. Seen from this angle the rich man and the humble are at the same esteem or lowliness to the Lord.

The second meaning is a metaphorical or spiritual meaning.

- The small person is at the same time a humble person
- Still he is high.
 - Not literary high.
 - He is high in his perseverance of faith.
- Then, very ironically, it is said that the rich man who cannot persevere in faith must revel in the fact that he is so small that he can be destroyed.

The Lord teaches that **such people are blessed**.

- This expression indicates that such people may lack worldly richness like money but that they receive treasure worth a lot more.
- The Lord will crown such people with eternal life.

- The crown referred to here is literally the laurel-wreath given, in those years, to winners at the Olympic games.

This whole matter of temptations is so important that the Lord again comes back to it. (v.12) The true believer must resist and tolerate temptations.

- In verse 3 the Lord taught that somebody with true faith persists in faith when tempted.
- In verse 12 the Lord teaches that the fact of you persisting in faith when tempted proves that your faith is true.

Here the Lord teaches exactly the same as in Revelation 2:10:

Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.

Immediately the question arises: Is it true that all people will persist when temptations come to them?

- Of course the answer is: No!
- There are people then falling into sin and listening exactly to the tempting voice of Satan.

The danger now exists of people rising against the Lord and resisting God.

- It is then when they say that the Lord is tempting them.

Clear as crystal the Bible here reveals that the Lord has nothing to do with evil and sin.

- Because of the omnipotence of God no evil and sin can have an external influence on Him.
- By the power of His holiness, He cannot be tempted to sin.

The Bible has now already cleared one matter very well: The devil is tempting us. But where does he start? What do we have to be careful of? The answer to this is found in verse 14.

- Mankind is opening their doors to Satan - he is making his own desires available to Satan.
- Once Satan gets a stronghold here he drags man away and tempts him into evil.
- After that, troubles reign.
 - The desires are impregnated
 - and this leads to the birth of sin being committed.

The believers persisting and fighting sin experience conversion and renewal given to them by the Lord.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning.
(James 1:17)

In closing the Bible has these words of mercy in verse 18 reminding us that it is not only sin impregnating us.

- The other possibility is that the Word may impregnate us.
- This results that we are brought into life in order to be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

This brings us to the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Christ been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep – such is written in 1 Corinthians 15.
- This has happened because the Lord made Himself available as Mediator, bearing our punishment, by God, for sin.

First He had to live a life persisting in faith and obedience to God.

- A life where faith-doubt never arose.
- He had to persist striving to offer Himself onto death, so that those He died for could follow Him in a life of persistence.
- He had to die and be resurrected from death, thereby enabling us to, like Him, also be resurrected from death as perfect and glorified.

After His ascension He sent His Holy Spirit back to us.

- One of the things done by the Holy Spirit is to engineer true faith in our hearts.
- And to then install all these faith-characteristics, as expected from us and described here, within us.

If we listen to God the Holy Spirit our faith will be strong and we will, as firstfruits of creation, carry the characteristics of people remade from sin into a religious life where we will lack nothing - as was the case with Elisha and Henoch.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 24:1,2

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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20 June 2008
Scripture King James Version