

## REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 23 MAY 2010 EVENING SERVICE

**Sing before:** Psalm 89:6

*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 2:6

**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 72:6

**Scripture reading:** Joshua 24.

**Scripture text:** Joshua 24:15

**But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.**

The Lord greatly resents people who believe that they can serve Him and at the same time fully enjoy the pleasures of sin.

An assembly of all Israel was held at Shechem.

- To be candid – this was not an ordinary assembly of the people.
- It actually was a service of public worship for it is recorded that the people “presented themselves before God”.

Shechem itself was a place of particular importance.

- In those days it was considered to be a holy place because at this place the LORD had revealed Himself in the past.
- This is where the LORD appeared to Abraham when he had just come to Canaan. Here too, Abraham put up an altar for the LORD.
- This was also the place where Jacob buried the idols found with his household.

The place Shechem therefore preaches God's fidelity in the fulfilment of His promises to Abraham and Jacob's solemn duty to break completely with all idolatry.

In the passage we have read together we find the Israelites assembled at this very place.

- Joshua is an old man and is to vacate his office. This he does at this occasion where the people stand before God in body and in soul.
- A public worship occurs when all the people lift their hearts up to God and when it is their common purpose to commune with God and to hear His Word.

Joshua then preaches a sermon that has the same content as that which the LORD revealed to Abraham and to Jacob at that place in the past.

- In the introductory verses the Israelites are reminded of the particular proofs of favour that the LORD showed the people of Israel. On that is founded the call to be true to the LORD.

God's electing love for this people is revealed as from the moment God called Abraham.

- From then onward the people of Israel no longer exist because of natural causes.
- Everything that is provided for them is by virtue of the LORD's grace.

In verses 5 to 7 especially it is emphasised that the LORD made them.

- Thereafter the history of the Israelites in Egypt is related and that the LORD sent Moses and Aaron and the ten plagues which the Lord provided.
- They are reminded thereof that the LORD prevented the Egyptians from harming His people during their flight.
- In this way God implemented His Plan for this people and guided them to the land where He wanted them to be.

Even the curse that Balaam was to utter was turned into a blessing.

- A fresh series of divine signs starts, of which the next is more miraculous and greater than the previous.
- In verses 11 to 12 it is related that the LORD had already broken their enemy's courage in advance, such as when He used hornets to help them conquer the enemy.

Then the application of Joshua's sermon is reached: *You really have no choice other than to serve the LORD wholeheartedly, because you owe Him, and Him alone, everything.*

Joshua's sermon then unexpectedly takes an important turn. The Israelites may not serve the LORD only outwardly.

- Form alone is insufficient. This applies to us and our congregation as well: attending church and outward co-operation in the congregation is not enough.
- There must also be spiritual co-operation.
  - There must be piety in your life.

- You must be a cordial sincere person. You must be steadfast for the LORD.
- Practically it means that you must be absolutely willing to break with all that is wrong.
- When you have gone wrong and sinned – break with it and do not repeat it. Live only for God and His truth.

At the time the spiritual condition of the Israelites was reasonably pure, but there were still many of them who served a number of idols.

- Although in general the Israelites were spiritually on par,
- there were a number of them who were weak and could infect the rest of the people.

The LORD then demands of them in that service to make a public confession of their faith.

- Choose whom you wish to serve! The LORD definitely does not mean that His election is thereby nullified and that the Israelites may exercise a choice and He will abide by it.
- Remember, He puts the choice to a chosen people! People who are predestined!
- But He demands of them that they show their true colour! He wants to know how they value all His grace, because later the Lord Jesus Himself says that not everyone is Israel who is out of Israel.

There are therefore a number of people among the People of the Covenant who shall not see the inside of heaven! That is why the faith of the people is tested: Choose!

Joshua does not exert any compulsion on them.

- He presents them with the choice of two different sets of idols and then states clearly that he and his household will serve the LORD.

Calvin, the reformer, attaches the following comment to this verse: *“It is not without reason that the freedom of choice is given, so that in future they would not be able to say that they were compelled how to choose. They must out of their own volition be compelled to keep the covenant.”*

The Israelites immediately are keen to stand with Joshua and his household.

- They will serve the LORD.
- But Joshua knew his people. How often did he not witness with his own eyes their rebellion against God and Moses?

Hence he does not believe them. He says to them: **“You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; He is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins.”**

It is a very serious moment, because God expects of us to remain steadfast in our faith and to express His holiness every moment of our life.

- That is why Joshua tells the Israelites that it is a grave error to think that one can pretend to serve the LORD and enjoy the pleasures of sin at the same time.
- Practically it means that we must always be aware thereof that the LORD sees us.
- In everything we do we must show on what side of the line we stand.
- This means that we must live a life of repentance otherwise we prove that we are citizens of hell.

These matters are not intended to make us faint-hearted but to make us value what we have received from the Lord and to urge us on to use it properly.

- We cannot collude with wrong things and expect to be acceptable to the Lord.
- Hence this terribly disturbing admonition: *You are not able to serve the LORD because you must remember that He is holy. He does not say one thing and do something different!*

Brothers and sisters, let this sermon of the Lord apply to us too.

- Let us make it our business to live as free from sin as possible and to live as strongly in our faith and to appreciate the Lord's mercy as highly as possible.
- That is also the grace in this sermon.

The Israelites only had the history of their forebears and of the flight from Egypt and the entry into the Promised Land. We have the Lord Jesus.

- He lived a godly life – free from sin
- He died as the Mighty One over death.
- He also gave us a land already cultivated – as the Israelites received at the time – but more than that because our land is the new earth and the city is one built by God.

We have received much more grace and will therefore be judged more harshly in God's judgment should we abuse this grace. That is why our life must each day testify to Joshua's words: **"But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD"**.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 103:11

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**

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 Scripture: New International Version