

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: FRIDAY 2 APRIL 2010: EASTER FRIDAY SERVICE

Sing before (standing): Scripture Versification 20-2:5

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 91:1,2

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 68:3

Scripture reading: Mark 15

Scripture text: Mark 15:21

Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross.

(Mark 15:21)

Today is Friday, the day of the Crucifixion. Today we commemorate the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we reflect about the happenings of those few days we realise how good the Lord is towards us.

The Lord is very well disposed towards us and continually He also promises us the best in the Bible.

As an example, we read in Psalm 91 that:

- The Lord shall cover us with His feathers, and under His wings we shall trust.
- That He is our Refuge
- That He shall give His angels charge over us, to keep us in all our ways and they shall bear us up in their hands.

To really understand this you must consider how the violence of death affects us as well as our fear of death and suffering.

- Consider our abhorrence when we think and talk about all the murders, rapes and matters like trading in women and children.
- Then there are also more physical threats like hijackings and armed robberies facing us.

It really tenses us up when we think about all the beautiful promises by the Lord, but everywhere we see this type of violence. How long will it take to reach us personally?

Should we soberly reflect about the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus, then we realise that these things did not happen to our Lord Jesus according to these promises.

- He suffered great spiritual and physical distress before dying.

Have you ever thought about what death really is? It has a few possible descriptions:

- It is when our bodies die.
 - In this dying of our bodies we see the eternal death of sinners landing in hell.
 - Often we see people experiencing great suffering before death and this also reminds us about all the grief of hell.
 - This could possibly be the sole reason of us fearing death!
- On the other hand we may also say that death is the method used by the Lord in cutting our life-ties to earth.
 - At first death was implemented as punishment for the sin of Adam, but now, through the Lord Jesus Christ, it became a doorway from this world to the hereafter that we enter through.

Although to Jesus, death was not a passing from this life towards God as it is presently the case for us.

- He had to, as a human, die the death of punishment.
- He Himself had no sins to be punished for, but as punishment for all our sins, He had to die.

This was an event severing His life-ties, as a human, to earth.

- He, by His death, had to bear the punishment of God.
- He had to follow up His death and funeral by victory over death – thereby redeeming all the chosen from death.
- Prior to creation God decided that this would be the only way He would accept atonement for all our sins.

Before creation the Lord also decided that He would, not only in the hereafter, but also in this life already, He would apply this reconciliation.

- This is where promises, for example, such as made as in Psalm 91, fit in.
- Old Testament revelations already reminded us that, by the Lord Jesus Christ, God would remove the destruction of hell from us.

This is meant as consolation and strengthening, so that from our side, we may see and appreciate the mercy of God and to be beneficial to our faith.

- All the Old Testament promises of protection and conservation thus preach the salvation by Jesus Christ.
- This is where the suffering of Jesus fits in.

With this sermon, let us reconsider everything that took place with the death of the Lord Jesus.

- The Thursday evening the suffering of Jesus already started heading towards a climax.
 - That evening Jesus already announced His death to His disciples.

- Practically thinking: Who of you would sleep relaxed and peacefully the night, knowing that your death is imminent?
- Therefore the Lord Jesus left the four confining walls of the Holy Communion room, to the freedom of the night – to His place of prayer.

Tension and tiredness gets the better of anybody and therefore the disciples, that night, just succumbed to sleep.

- Just think: If the tension affected them to the extent of preventing them from supporting the Lord in His struggle of meeting death, how it must have affected the Lord Himself!
- The Lord Jesus bore this great tension alone – from anxiety He sweated blood.
- Later that night the Lord Jesus was captured.
- Because Jesus was shunted from one court to another, the matter of the trial became a farce.
 - No administration of justice took place at any of the trials!
 - A reason to move the Roman authorities in executing the death penalty to Jesus was sought for.

It then became Friday morning. The high priests, elders, scribes and the complete assembly eventually came to a decision.

- The Lord Jesus had to die!
- Tate note: They were unable to decide whether He was guilty of any offence. Without any grounds they decided that He had to die.

The Lord Jesus was then taken to Pilate where the execution had to be done.

- In order to favourably influence the feeling of the audience Jesus was whipped and ridiculed.
- Eventually the matter progressed to an actual trial by Pilate.

Here we glean that facing Pilate, the Lord Jesus was held as rebel leader.

- Jesus, because He claimed to be King of the Jews, was guilty of high treason.
- He was supposed to gather followers in rebelling against the Roman Empire.

Therefore Pilate put the question: Are You the King of the Jews?

- His doubt about the truth of the stories told by the Jews is proved by his judgement that he could not find anything by which Jesus deserved the death penalty.

Are you able to see that every facet of this history was a deepening of Jesus' suffering?!

- At this stage the Jews started shouting that the blood of Jesus should rest upon them and their children!

The Lord must have suffered untold grief experiencing that the people to whose salvation He came, were those rejecting and wanting to kill Him!

It was the rule that somebody to be crucified, first had to be whipped.

- This they did to the Lord Jesus as well.
- The soldiers were people worshipping their Caesar. With joy they flogged Jesus, as they detested everybody opposing their Caesar.
- Therefore they handled the Lord very roughly.

- The soldiers were thus outsiders to the faith and were completely unaware of what all this was about or of their part in the fulfilment of God's counsel!

Consider how the pain and flogging added to the depletion of Jesus' last human strength.

- By that time Jesus must have been very physically weakened.
- Observe how God forsook His Son and caused Him to suffer, so that all punishment befitting us was metered out to this Jesus.

The soldiers, in their ignorance, added a further downside to the suffering of the Lord Jesus.

- Mockingly, they made Him a king.
- Indeed, a caricature of a king – with a crown of thorns and the cloak of a soldier.
- But hereby the devil had his subordinates actually confessing Jesus as King.

Then Jesus, according to custom, had to carry His own cross to the place where He would be crucified.

- The beams were so heavy that it was difficult for a single person to carry or drag it.
- The idea was that this had to add to the suffering of the convicted.

In this way he (the convicted) had to co-operate in his own execution.

- Hereby the people put their consciences to rest and claimed that the convicted agreed with his sentence and that it was thus justly metered out to him!

The procession moved through narrow streets and eventually reached the outskirts of the town.

- There a man came walking through the field.
 - He was going in the opposite direction of the procession.
 - From the Bible it is clear that this man was not planning to accompany the procession.
- But the soldiers compelled this man to carry Jesus' cross.

The mercy of God is meant for all suffering for His sakes and therefore Simon, the man who had to carry the cross, because of this happening, came to conversion.

- Not only him. Together with him, his complete household came to conversion as the Bible refers to him as Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus.
- Many years later, in Romans 16:13, Paul refers to the son, Rufus, as "chosen in the Lord."

Although the mercy of the Lord Jesus suddenly enveloped an unknown heathen so that he gained access to God's Kingdom, this deed deepened the suffering of Jesus!

- Jesus was too weak to carry his cross and somebody else was supplied.
- But the crucifixion went on!

Now consider the meaning of the crucifixion.

- Everybody present saw how Jesus was nailed to the cross, how He suffered and eventually died.
- But what they could not see was that all God's wrath about our sins against Him was, at that same moment, punished to Jesus Christ.
- This whilst Jesus was so innocent that even Pilate, the Roman heathen, openly declared His innocence.

By His death Jesus broke down the wall that separated us from God.

- By His pain and spiritual suffering He reconciled the wrath of the Lord about all our wrongdoing.
- By this way we gained access to heaven.
- The conversion of Simon was symbolic of our conversion that would follow from the merit won by Jesus Christ through His crucifixion.

Here on earth we still experience tension.

- Every now and then one of us dies.
- In our land we are subjected to all sorts of tension.
- Where does this fit into the crucifixion?

Our earthly suffering is aimed at the purpose of us realising our own helplessness and desolation through sin.

- In these matters we experience only our own inability against the attacks, by the devil, on us.
- This causes us to again realise our need for the mercy and protection by the Lord!

We may deeply hope on the promises by God, as per example those in Psalm 91, because, through Resurrection-Sunday, the Lord proved that His abilities are limitless.

- He rules over death
- He rules with such an amount of power over death and every bit of the satan's works that He also guides us thereover.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus caused the hell to splinter.

- It muted the satan – by that he, forever broken, emerged from the battle.
- Now he, as written by Peter, is only able to go about on earth, causing destruction.

Beloved in the Lord, these events are to your consolation:

- The protection by the Lord rises above time – therefore Jesus had to suffer.
- As proof, Simon was converted from heathendom.

Therefore the Lord arose and lives eternally.

- Simon the converted, through this resurrection, thus also lives eternally.
- This Simon is the symbol of us – our eternal life and the salvation engineered by God for all that believe in Jesus Christ.

As such Psalm 91, in our modern times also, is true. Therefore, through all the tension we experience during these times, remember this:

- God rules the history.
- There are no earthly powers, nations or political parties, able to determine history.

God has already written the history.

- In this history the powers of evil and destruction still abide to the will of God – just like the Roman soldiers who thought that they were serving the Caesar, but in fact were confessing the Lord.

Live with the knowledge that whatever may happen to us, the Lord will grant us the power to bear it without us losing our faith and without us becoming lost.

The death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus is thus the proof that the Lord can (and will), from total destruction, bring us to the everlasting glory.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 121:3,4

The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you.
The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.

Amen

Dr MJ Du Plessis
Reformed Church Bellville
2 April 2010
Scripture Modern King James Version