

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 17 AUGUST 2008: MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 16:15

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 68:1

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 4:2

Law

Psalm: 4:2

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 73:10

Scripture reading: Mark 4

Scripture text: Mark 4:12

so that they may see clearly but not perceive, and they may hear clearly but not understand, otherwise they might turn around and be forgiven. (Mark 4:12)

The Lord Jesus is teaching a group of people, gathered around Him, in a way that all can clearly understand what He is talking about.

In their imagination they could even picture the events happening.

They understand that the Lord meant that a sermon does not just leave one unaffected.

- For the hereafter brings about either life or death.
- It also brings about a partitioning between people:
 - On the one hand are grouped the people believing in the redemption, and faithfully accepting it when hearing about it.
 - On the other hand are those, hearing the sermon of the Lord, taking little or no heed at all.

A sower goes out to sow.

- On his way to the land, he lost some of the seed.
- When sowing, not all the seed will fall on the land.
 - The people of those times did not possess any of our modern planting equipment. They walked, strewing it by hand. The wind would then carry some of the seed beyond the land.

In this parable, the same happens to the sower.

- His land, like most of the lands in that vicinity, is on a mountain-slope.
- The lands are quite small.
 - As the sower walks, strewing the seed, some falls outside of the land.
 - Some places are rocky whilst other places are overgrown with weeds.

At any rate, the ground outside is not cultivated and therefore the seeds falling there have no chance of growing and bearing.

A large number of the listeners hear the parable but do not understand it.

- They turn their backs and leave.
- The few remaining also do not understand the parable.
- Together with the disciples, they approached Him, seeking clarification of the parable.

The Sower sows the Word of God (v.14)

- It is the preaching of the gospel.
 - Or should we want to put it in a modern way, it is the sermon.
- This preaching of the gospel is like the seed being sown.
 - It does not bear the same yield everywhere.

Jesus is teaching that although there are many people who hear the gospel, the power of God's Word is lost by many of them.

The parable gives the reason.

- Spiritually many people are barren – like the seed falling on a hard trodden road, on a rock or amongst the weeds.

What makes this parable a very serious matter is the fact that the Lord is not referring to people who openly deny God, nor to the heathen, but specifically refers to churchgoers.

- We, who are constantly being preached to.
- Therefore the Lord also says: "Let the person who has ears to hear, listen!"

Everybody attending church, hearing the gospel, do not hear in order to listen and understand. They do not grasp what is being preached.

Some of the listeners, possessing spiritual ears and using them, can hear what the Spirit of God, through the Word, is telling the congregation.

- Those who hear do not do so by virtue of their own ability.
- In Psalm 40:7 it is written that God opens their ears thus enabling them to hear and understand.
- This does not negate the fact that in the congregation there are also those who do not want to hear and are thus turning a deaf ear.

From the beginning till the end the Lord teaches great and abundant mercy, but together with that, enormous judgement.

- In mercy God addresses us,
- but our sinful deafness causes eternal death and anxiety.

Luke wrote this parable down in his gospel.

- The people he consulted remembered other matters, taught by the Lord, not written down by Mark.
- For example he records that the Lord said that the ones on the path are the people who listen, but then the devil comes and takes the Word away from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. (Luke 8:12)

This we must not interpret as the devil having power over these people.

- They are grateful to him for taking the Word away from their hearts, because in the very next verse Luke is teaching that the ones on the stony ground are the people who welcome the word, resisting temptation for a while.
- Thus: those in faith resisting sin, but eventually succumbing to it.
- Because they have at least tried, they showed a better yield, which is more than could be said by those next to the road.

Consider the meaning of what is said here.

- Our sins cannot nullify the power of the gospel.
- The Gospel retains the power of bearing fruit in the lives of people.
- In the lives of people where responsibility may be found, the fruits of everlasting life are present, but in the lives of the others no fruit of life will be found, only that of death.

Now apply this parable on the points of comparison.

- Firstly Jesus is referring to the churchgoers who hear the Word.
 - The seed next to the road are the people hearing the Word and sermon but taking no interest.

- We know them – it is those who should actually come under censure.
 - He who hears in judgement and mercy, the sermon but turns around, hardening himself.
 - It is he who through his sinful life confirms openly that he is dead to the kingdom of God.

The Bible teaches that the majority of the people listened to the sermon by the Lord Jesus.

- But they then rose and left.
- Those are the ones who fell next to the road.

Then there are those with a temporary faith.

- That is the seed falling on the rock.
- They start off well, but after a while the going becomes too difficult for them.
- They then fall back into a worldly life.
- They are the people pretending to believe, but not taking the Word of God to heart.

Joyously receiving the gospel is certainly very praiseworthy.

- But the praiseworthiness disappears when, time and again, they reveal it to be a faith without steadfastness.
- The true desire to live a God-fearing life is lacking.

Then there are those with faith like seed falling amongst weeds.

- They know the demands of faith but falter every time it comes against a demand of the world.
- They are strangled by the pleasures of the world.
- Afterwards their faith is smothered so that it cannot bear live fruit.

May any one of these three groups partake of Holy Communion?

- This is a question that everybody has to answer for him or herself, because what you hear each week during the sermon, is confirmed to you at the Lord's supper
- May you come to the table of the Lord for spiritual strengthening when in essence the world is your first love?

May we love the wrong things but look to God for consolation?

- Is that not being hypocritical?
- Is that not exactly the appearance of a defeated faith?

The Lord Jesus describes these people negatively:

- The people look and look but do not see God.
- People hearing and hearing but not understanding that the promises by God are applicable to them, demanding responsible conduct.

We have a responsibility towards the promises of the Lord, namely that it has to be like seed falling on a fertile acre.

- The interests of God must come first.
- No setback must be able to alienate us from God.
- The Word then causes life in us.
- Otherwise the Word causes eternal death.

Because the Lord Jesus Christ is coming to separate, it cannot be otherwise.

- This is also a reason for His death.

- By His atoning death he destroyed the Satan causing a definite separation between death and life as well as between faith and unbelief.

With the clarification we have to keep in mind that God Himself is the Sower.

- In a way the time of His mercy is also running out.
- We avow that the day of judgement is drawing close and that the Lord Jesus Christ, teaching this parable, is coming in judgement over the living and the dead.

The indifferent and half hearted – the deserters of God, trying to cover it up, - they all will be condemned for not bearing any fruits of faith.

Because they did not want to respond to the preaching of God's Word.

The Sower of the Word is God Himself.

Take heed of the teachings of the Lord Himself.

- Because He, who sent the Holy Spirit sowing the Word in our hearts, is calling us to His table.
- It is a supper where He wants to confirm the assurance of His redemption to all those who can and want to obey the will of the Lord.
- It is like the seed falling on fertile soil, cultivated by God, growing and giving life forever.

Be fertile in word and deed so that, on the day of Christ coming to harvest the crop sown by the Sower, your faith may bear its fruit!

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 48:1

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.

Dr MJ Du Plessis
Reformed Church Bellville
17August 2008
Scripture ISV

Summary of the sermon:

We have to understand very well that the preaching of the Lord's Word does not leave us unaffected.

For the hereafter brings about either life or death. It also brings about a partitioning between people:

- On the one hand are grouped the people believing in the redemption, and faithfully accepting it when hearing about it.
- On the other hand are those, hearing the sermon of the Lord, taking little or no heed at all.