

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 7 MARCH 2010: MORNING SERVICE

Sing before (Standing): Psalm 65:5

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 118:12

Confession of faith: Apostolic

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, a holy universal Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting

Amen.

After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 25:5

Law

Psalm: 25:5

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 105:15

Scripture reading: Matthew 16:1 – 11; Mark 8

Scripture text: Mark 8:12b

But He sighed deeply in His spirit, and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation." (Mark 8:12)

You do not go about daily asking for signs about every matter the Lord wants you to believe. True faith is based in trust of the invisible.

1. **The Pharisees and the external worship.**
2. **Self-righteousness the result of external worship.**
3. **The Lord Jesus Christ and faith.**

1. **The Pharisees and the external worship.**

This passage of history took place just after the Lord fed the four thousand people in the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon.

- Afterwards the Lord sent the people home but He and His disciples returned to Galilee.
- As soon as the Lord arrived in the vicinity of Galilee the Pharisees and Sadducees started bothering Him – they immediately started arguing with Jesus about His deeds.

The gospel of Mark only tells about the Pharisees interrogating the Lord. The other gospels also describing these events teach that the Sadducees were part of the delegation.

- The Sadducees were normally in the background.
- They represented the priests and were in the majority of the Jewish Council (Sanhedrin) at Jerusalem.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were not on good footing with each other.

- They were in continual argument about the interpretation of the law.
- The Pharisees believed in the existence of angels and life after death – the Sadducees, on their part, did not believe in angels and life after death.
- The fact of these two groups of enemies uniting against the Lord brings home the realisation of how intense this attack against Him was.

They – as spiritual leaders – of course did not at all condone the teachings and conduct of Jesus.

- Eventually they realised that the Lord Jesus did not need their consent and authorisation for His actions.
- He acted with authority differing from theirs.

Shrewdly, as they were, they then planned to publicly ensnare the Lord.

- Therefore He must give them *a sign from heaven*.
- This means that, in their presence, He must give them a visible and tangible sign – a sign straight from heaven proving that God sent Him.
- They therefore demanded that God, by some means or another, must prove from heaven that He favours Jesus and is co-operating with Him in His conduct.

Moses caused manna to come down from heaven.

- At Sinai God, by a voice from heaven, confirmed the authority of Moses. Jesus must also do something like that.
- Then they will recognise Him and believe in Him.

This was actually not dealing with the **faith** of the Pharisees.

In fact it was dealing with their **disbelief**.

- Therefore the Bible put it that the Pharisees were *tempting* the Lord.
- It was not at all a matter of coming to faith, but an attempt to attack and humiliate the Lord.

They reasoned that seeing that the Lord Jesus said that He was from heaven, He therefore must be able to give a sign from heaven as well.

- Therefore their complete approach is false: they make their faith to be dependent upon a sign.
- This, by making your faith dependent upon specific conditions, is of course always the ways of disbelief.

2. Self-righteousness the result of external worship.

Thus the situation in which the Pharisees appointed themselves as judges over the Lord Jesus arose.

- They would command Him to give a sign and then they would judge the matter.
- It boils down to sinful people determining the measure in deciding whether the Lord's Son is the Messiah or not.

Anybody can see that this deals with self-righteousness and arrogance.

- The Pharisees held themselves in very high esteem – so much so that in their eyes, they were worth more than what the Lord valued them.
- Their complete action against the Lord deals with the fact that He, by His teachings, exposed their arrogance and disbelief.

The Lord Jesus just sighed deeply.

- He, in reality, was very disappointed that believers could fool themselves like this.
- And that in their blindness, they could believe that they were all-seeing.
- In fact it is horrifying when you realise that people, spiritually blind, wanted to see whether Jesus is really the Lord.

Why does this generation seek a sign?

- Take note that the Lord did not answer this question.
- The fact of the Lord not answering to this question underlines the matter stronger.
- They have seen enough of His power and greatness!
- And not only did they see, they also heard Jesus teaching.

But exactly that was the problem!

- They saw and heard things that they did not like at all.
- The things they saw about the omnipotence of Jesus brought them to the realisation of how small and powerless they were.
- This they also discovered in their sins. They did not like it at all.

By His answer Jesus joined to their referral of the heavens.

- He extended his arm to the heavens and told them that they know how to discern the face of the sky.
- When the sky is red in the evening they expect fair weather.
- When, in the morning, the sky is red they predict foul weather. They were able to understand nature.

But when coming to spiritual matters, because they are tuned into external matters only, they do not understand anything.

- The abundance of miracles performed by the Lord and known to them, do not bear witness of human capabilities.
- They should have been able to see that it was the works of God.

Also, as experts of the Scriptures, they should have been the first to bring the behaviour of Jesus Christ into context with the prophecies about the Messiah.

- John the Baptist had already pointed out to them that the promises about the Messiah are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.
- They, on the other, hand just could not see it.

The Jews had the inclination of externalising their faith.

- For everything, prior to believing it, they wanted to see a sign.
- Therefore in 1 Corinthians 1:22 it is written that the Jews asked for a sign when hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ. **(For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom- 1 Corinthians 1:22)**

The Lord, knowing the hearts of humans, thus realised that this search for a sign was only to satisfy their own sense of righteousness.

- These Pharisees lacked true faith.
- A sign would add nothing to their conversion as all the signs they have already seen only led to their hardening.

1 Corinthians 1:23 brings the matter into perspective: The Lord Jesus Christ and the faith in Him stand in contrast to external signs.

- This is why, in this case, the Lord did not grant the Jews a sign and why He just went away from them.
- This need to always see external signs stands in disparity to the nature of true faith.
- The Lord put it very clearly when He said to Thomas:
Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29)

True faith appeals to trust:

- You must have trust in that what the Lord, through His Word, assures you about.
- Faith requires that you have to be totally obedient to what God asks – not on condition that the Lord must first confirm it by a sign.

3. The Lord Jesus Christ and faith.

The Lord Jesus Christ, without giving them a sign, turned away from them on that day.

- He wanted to make it very clear to them that faith is an internal matter.
- In Matthew 16 we read that the Lord called the group tempting Him a wicked and adulterous generation.
 - They are no longer the bride of the Lord.
 - They are wicked and tainted by sin.
 - They became like a woman committing adultery – in other words an unfaithful bride.

Still the Lord did give them a sign!

- He told them that they do have the sign of the prophet Jonah.

- The sign of Jonah is that Jonah was inside the fish for three days and then emerged back into life.

Therewith the Lord Jesus prophesied that He would die and arise after three days.

- When the Lord Jesus died, He arose after three days.
- The intention of the Lord was that when this happens they should understand that it was the sign from heaven happening in front of their eyes.

It is only power and might from heaven that can be able to exit life when He wants, and again, when He wants, command life from death.

- Only somebody from heaven can die and become alive again.
- Should the Pharisees have had any insight they would have known that the promises of atonement for sin have herewith gone into fulfilment.

The sign of Jonah was a prediction that the Lord would beget life from death – not only in the Person of the Messiah – also for those belonging to Him.

- With that the Lord predicted that He would bear the punishment of death so that the believers will not need to enter death.
- The sign of Jonah was also like a division between the people:
 - Some were able to see and understand this sign.
 - Others could not see nor understand it – because this sign had relevance to faith. Only by faith can the resurrection of Jesus Christ be seen and understood.

Nowadays many new religions are appearing everywhere. You make contact with it through the media: newspapers and even on television.

- Many of these religions only flourish on external matters: all sorts of signs, like the curing of diseases, speaking in tongues and various miracles.

The Lord puts it clearly that a religion resting only on external signs also depends upon the judgement of mankind.

- It becomes a religion where **you** determine the measurements and where **you** decide how you want to serve the Lord.
- At most it becomes a religion in which mankind want to judge whether God is God.

Mankind creates a test that the Lord has to pass before He would be accepted as God. The same as the Pharisees who demanded, from the Lord Jesus, a sign from heaven.

True faith encompasses knowledge of the Scriptures.

- Together with that it means that you must be able to use and understand this knowledge.
- You must be able to read from the Bible the signs in history and to see how God is unfolding His counsel.
- You must be able to see that the Lord Jesus has revealed to you that He is God – without receiving daily signs.
- You must be able to see that He died for your sake and by His resurrection also grants you eternal life.

Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation.

Keep in mind that the Lord called the group who tempted Him a wicked and adulterous generation. Precisely because to them it revolved around the matter of a sign.

- The externalisation of their faith caused them to no longer be the bride of the Lord.
- The Lord describes people in such a state as bad and tainted by sin. They become like a woman committing adultery.

Together with that, keep in mind that we are again expecting the Lord and that the amalgamation between the Lord and the church is described as the marriage between the Lord and His bride. Believe then, like the bride, in the perfection and truth of the Bridegroom.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 128:1

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
7 March 2010
Scripture Modern King James Version