

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 9 MARCH 2008: MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Hymn 2-4:2 (33:2)

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 31:1+15

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 catholic* 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: 33:2

Scripture: Numbers 20

Text: 20:12

But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in Me enough to honour Me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them"."

Disobedience and disloyalty are severely punished by the Lord. But where remorse is found the Lord's punishment is limited to this life only.

1. **The people's discontent**
2. **The Lord's trial for them**
3. **The Lord's mercy**

1. **The people's discontent**

The Israelites had to journey through the wilderness for a period of forty years so that all who were born in Egypt could die.

- The reason for this was that these people were always complaining and rebellious about everything that went wrong.
- They always complained that in Egypt life was better than out there in the desert.

The forty years are almost over. The Lord is going to test the Israelites to see whether they have changed and repented their sins. What do they look like and what have they seen of the Lord during these years?

- It is a youthful people who saw the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.
- The Lord was inside the pillar of cloud. (Numbers 14:14; Exodus 13:21+22; 14:19+24; Deuteronomy 31:15; Psalm 99:7)
- They were fed daily with manna and quails.
- They therefore felt daily in their bodies the almighty and mercy of the Lord.

Furthermore, they all participated in the Lord's election of a High Priest for His people. The Lord said that this way He would put an end to the constant grumbling by the Israelites.

- The name of the head of each tribe was to be written on a staff.
- All twelve staffs were then placed by Moses in the Tent of the Testimony.

The next day Aaron's staff had sprouted, budded and produced almonds. (Numbers 17)

- The Lord then commanded Moses to put Aaron's staff back into the Tent of Testimony to be kept as a sign to the rebellious people.
- That also caused the Israelites to complain that they all would die because the holiness of the Lord would kill them

The Israelites now stand at Kadesh. There is no water. How does a people that has had the visible presence of the Lord with it for almost forty years conduct itself?

- One would expect that they would immediately gather in prayer.
- By that time they should have known that each time they prayed sincerely to the Lord, He answered their prayers!

But that did not happen.

- Instead the Israelites turned on Moses and Aaron and complained that they wished that they had died also when their brothers fell dead before the Lord.
- That probably was a reference to the occurrence described in Numbers 14:36-37:
"So the men Moses had sent to explore the land, who returned and made the whole community grumble against him by spreading a bad report about it – these men responsible for spreading the bad report about the land were struck down and died of a plague before the Lord. Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived".

They refer precisely to the ten men sent to explore the land of Canaan who made a bad report about it.

- The grumblers have come to the same conclusion! The land is unfit for producing grain, figs or grapevines.
- They suggest that the ten men struck down by the Lord died innocently as they were proved to be correct.
- The grumblers before Moses think that it would have been better had they also died then because then they would not be suffering all the hardship now.

2. The Lord's trial

By this time Moses and Aaron were exasperated by the rebelliousness of the people.

- They went to the Tent of Meeting where the Lord appeared to them in His glory.
- He instructed them to fetch Aaron's staff and take that to a rock.
- The Israelites must all assemble there.

The question presents itself – why this staff?

- The answer is that this staff is the symbol of the Lord's election and of His almighty.
- The Israelites remember well that during one night that staff produced buds, flowers and almonds – it occurred only recently.
- The staff is to serve as proof to Moses and the Israelites that the Lord is present in their midst.

A similar situation arose when the Israelites came to Rephidim and found no water there. (Exodus 17) The Lord reveals that the present situation differs from that one.

- Then the Israelites were still fresh out of Egypt.
- Then the Lord told Moses to take the staff with which he had struck the Nile and with it strike the rock at Horeb.
- The Lord said that He would stand there and give water to the people.

The present situation is different because by this time the Israelites should have progressed in their faith and their knowledge of God's almighty.

- This time Moses is not to strike the rock as he did then – he must speak to the rock.
- The Lord wants His people to learn the power of His Word free from anything that might resemble the magic of idolatrous practices. (In fact, the Word of the Lord is so powerful that He created through it.)

The Lord therefore expects of Moses to stand before the Israelites in a secure faith and to show them that at the Lord's command deliverance from death is provided. They will not perish from thirst because the Lord will make the rock open and bring forth water.

Moses and Aaron went away to gather the Israelites at the rock.

- What they did not know was that for them too that day would bring a decisive moment for their lives.
- The rebelliousness of the people that day perhaps drove Moses too far.

When they arrived at the rock Moses made a speech in which his resentment towards the Israelites was expressed strongly.

- He withdraws from them and makes it plain that they are a rebellious lot.

- He does not call on the holiness and almight of God.
- He asked them whether they wished them (Moses and Aaron) to provide them with water from that rock.
- Psalm 106:33 says that Moses was angry and spoke unadvisedly:
“for they rebelled against the Spirit of God, and rash words came from Moses’ lips.”
- Thereafter Moses struck the rock twice with the staff.

3. The Lord’s mercy

Although Moses had done wrong, the Lord still extended to him the mercy He had promised.

- Water did flow from the rock and the people and their cattle could drink.
- But the Lord confronted Moses and Aaron with their disobedience.

It may appear not to have been a serious sin, but it was a serious transgression against the holiness of the Lord.

- Moses failed to do what he had been instructed to and did precisely that which he should not have done.
- He created the perception that it was not the almight of God that made the water flow from the rock but his own power.
- He actually stole God’s honour.

The people and their cattle all drank and were happy – but there was no joy between the Lord and Moses and Aaron.

- The Lord pronounces His punishment on them.
- He says that they did not trust in Him.
- Also they failed to sanctify Him before the people.

The Lord now sanctifies Himself.

- He refuses them entry into the Promised Land.
- That means that all that these two men were called for and what they had dedicated themselves to was denied them.

The Lord makes it clear to Israel that He has the power to take away that which is of the greatest importance to somebody.

- By this act of punishment it was made perfectly plain to Israel:
- That it was the Lord who provided the water.
- And that He punishes everyone who fails to sanctify His Name.
- The Israelites now also knew that the Lord does not need magical demonstrations such as striking the rock – His word alone is sufficient to move anything to obedience – even a rock to providing water.

In Deuteronomy 33:8 the Lord says that Massah and Meribah were trials to test the faith of the Israelites and of Moses and Aaron.

- Moses and Aaron failed the test. Clearly, the Israelites also did and in a sense the Lord punished Moses and Aaron in their stead.
- Apparently the Israelites subsequently showed regret that their rebelliousness had caused the punishment of Moses and denied him entry into Canaan.
- We read in Deuteronomy 1:37 that Moses tells the Israelites that the Lord was angry with him for their sakes.

- He was therefore punished for their sins.

With us it is precisely so.

- Our sinful condition makes us like these people dying of thirst.
- Yet we do not die, because the Lord is merciful to us as He was with the Israelites.
- He provides a Mediator who is punished in our stead as Moses was punished in the place of the Israelites so that we may live – Jesus Christ.

The Israelites saw and understood that somebody was being severely punished in their stead so that for them livelihood could be provided.

- Later they regretted it.
- Likewise we must know that Jesus Christ was struck by the wrath of God in our stead so that we may live forever.

The Israelites felt pain.

- They saw only God's punishment.
- Yet, when we look at Moses, he found grace with God, so that in a way the punishment passed him by.
- The Israelites only knew that the Lord punished Moses – he may not enter the promised land.

But Moses was permitted to see the entire land in the presence of the Lord.

- The Lord Himself showed him the land bit by bit.
- That was something greater and more glorious than anything that Moses would have had in the Promised Land with the grumbling Israelites around him.
- You may read it yourself in Deuteronomy 34:
- The Lord showed Moses every place where every tribe would be placed.
- He showed him the land of Jordan – more than any of the Israelites would ever see although they had entered the promised land.

We as a congregation must test ourselves against this passage.

- The Lord calls us daily to repentance and faith.
- We must examine ourselves continuously.
- We must know that every moment of disobedience is an attempt by Satan to cause us to be subject to the Lord's wrath.
- What was true of Moses and the Israelites is still true of us today.

We must not wait for the Lord to teach us through adversity to be obedient and to repent.

- That is unnecessary for after the ascension of Jesus the Lord empowered us with His own wisdom when the Holy Spirit was poured out on us.\
- Listen to the Lord's admonition when you go wrong and turn away.
- Live in such a way that for all in your life you give God the glory.
- Beware of all conceit because conceit may cause you to claim to be God, as Moses did, and to claim His glory whereas it belongs to Him.

And, when you truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour you may be assured that the sins you commit against your will, are all forgiven by your Mediator Jesus Christ.

- The promise of the cross is that you have the prophetic vision that in the blood of Jesus Christ you live on the New Earth.

- While Moses was denied entry into the Promised Land, you are, through Jesus Christ, assured of entry into the kingdom of God.

Amen

Closing prayer

Closing Psalm: 149:1+2

The Lord bless you and keep you

The Lord make His face shine on you and be merciful to you

The Lord turn His countenance to you and give you peace

Amen

Dr MJ Du Plessis

Reformed Church Bellville

9 March 2008 (morning)

NIV