

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 7 MARCH 2010: MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 89:9.

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 103:3

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 38:1+17

Law

Psalm: 38:1+17

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 107:8

Scripture reading: Psalm 92.

Text: Psalm 92 + Heidelberg Catechism Lord's day 4.

In Lord's day 2 we learnt that we live in sinful misery.

- We also saw that the Law removes all doubt about that – we sin almost every moment and we transgress all the commandments of the Law.
- There is not one commandment we can keep to.

Let us reconsider this issue.

- It is abundantly clear that we are unable to keep the Law. We simply do not have the ability to live as holy a life as is demanded of us!
- Why, then, does the LORD put the Law before us? Is the LORD not unjust towards us in requiring of us to do that which we are incapable of?

We are all troubled by this matter and that is why we are taught here how the Lord's punishment and grace is revealed by the Law.

- Firstly we are taught that the Lord has every right to demand certain things from us.
- Then we are taught in the next question that the Lord has every right to punish us for our disobedience.
- But then we are taught in the last question of the love of God, that He is merciful.

The Lord has determined a Plan according to which He shall save us from our sin.

- Who of us has not struggled with the will of God? Who of us has not asked whether the Lord is truly just?
- We do not always understand why the Lord does some things in our lives.
- Often the Lord's providence appears to us to be totally wrong and irrational.

We find examples of this in the Bible as well. Consider Jacob.

- Initially he was one of the most dishonest persons imaginable:
 - Remember how he tampered with Laban's stock in order to build the best flock for himself.
 - We read little that is bad about his brother Esau.
 - Yet it is written that the Lord loved Jacob and hated Esau. Is this fair and just?

Think of David, the great king of the Old Testament.

- He steals the wife of Uriah.
- He then in cowardly fashion causes Uriah to be put to death.
- Eventually the Lord prohibits him from building the temple because he has shed too much blood.
- But the Lord says that David is a man according to His heart!

Why does our conception of right and wrong differ so much from the Lord's?

- The first problem is the fact that we received a Law from God that we cannot keep.
- We are saddled with the problem that God knows that we cannot keep His Law but does not set us free from it!

All of us have tried to live strictly according to the Ten Commandments.

- And all of us have discovered that we cannot do so,
- We became more and more convinced of our inability towards the Law.

And if that was not enough to discourage us we read in the next question: *Will God permit such disobedience to go unpunished?*

- The answer shocks us! It is written that God will by no means allow this disobedience to go unpunished!
- He is terribly displeased with all sin and he shall punish it in just judgment.
- Here we are faced with the problem of the Lord's justness that we are unable to understand.

Then we read the question: *Is then God not merciful?*

- By this time we long for some mercy; for so far the questions and answers were only filled with the darkness of judgment.
- We then learn from the Bible that God is indeed merciful but that He is likewise just. Again the issue of justness.

How do mercy and justness meet? To be able to understand and to believe these matters to our comfort we must first discover the meaning of justness. What does justness mean to the Lord?

Let us first find the reason why our concept of right and wrong differs from that of God.

- The cause is sin. Because of sin our concept has become troubled.
- We have gradually because of our egoism put our ideas on the forefront and in so doing alienated from us God's idea of justness.

Because of sin the matter has now gone so far that modern man wants to impose his concept of justness onto God instead of heeding the commandments of the Lord.

- With some people the situation has developed that they become rebellious if the Lord does not do justice according to their desires.
- It is almost as if they want to summon the Lord to appear before their court.

And that is where the error lies.

- We measure with defective yardsticks.
- We cannot measure justness with our yardsticks because we cannot judge the Lord by our yardsticks.
- The truth of the matter is that God is just in His Law, He is the only One who can truly judge right and wrong, we cannot.

Bearing this in mind, we now examine the matter from the beginning.

- God creates man.
- He commands man to live with Him in fellowship. Man must worship God. He must heed the voice of the Lord.
- That is God's justness.

That is why God comes and puts up a covenant in which He stipulates that He is our God and we are His people. The contents of the covenant is therefore nothing else but the purpose for which man was created!

Then follows the fall into sin.

- Man steps into a relationship of disloyalty to the LORD.
- In other words, a relationship of unrighteousness.
- Because man, on the advice of Satan, suddenly refused to glorify God.

In practice this meant that man put up new demands and values.

- He no longer wants to glorify God because he thinks that this would be just as he himself is God.
- The new demands put up by man sever the bond of communion with God.
- Righteousness now means to man that he can live independent from God – to live his own life – as it is put today.
- Righteousness thus means to be free from God.

In that way what was from the beginning unrighteous with God became righteous with man.

- That is why our values differ from God's values.
- We have changed whereas God's righteousness has remained unaltered.

Now we find this wrongfulness in our life. Have you noticed how wrongly we pray?

- We pray that God should not execute His righteousness on us because we would then be destroyed.
- We then pray that the Lord should be merciful to us.
- Is the matter not exactly the opposite? For it is precisely God's righteousness that moves Him to be merciful to us!

It is God's righteousness that in love He is a Father to us who loves His children.

- It is the Lord's righteousness that He created us different from the animals and that He is fully entitled to demand of us that we obey His righteousness.
- Therefore our righteousness – and that what we regard as just – is false because we severed fellowship with God and the righteousness of Satan rules in us.

We had the complete ability to keep the righteousness of the Lord, but we chose otherwise.

- The righteousness of God did not cause our fall because it was God's righteousness that caused us to be created in true righteousness and holiness.
- Is the Lord now to alter His righteousness because our righteousness has become depraved?
- May we expect the Lord to ease His demands because we – by our own choice – fell into sin? Of course not!

Which brings us to the second issue: Whereas it is our own fault that we no longer are able to keep the Law of the Lord, we surely cannot expect of Him not to punish sin!

- It then follows logically that He has no alternative but to punish sin which is committed against His most high majesty.
- Because He is God He must maintain His holiness!

Whenever we still try to keep the Law of the Lord, we fail to do so, because we do it half-heartedly.

- We try to keep the Law in such a way that we keep asking the question whether the sinful path next to the Law might not be more congenial.

This question of sin does not concern Adam – it is about us.

- We are the people seeking a life outside God's righteousness.
- We have, because of sin, developed a false set of rules for righteousness, and now expect God to comply therewith.

- That happened because we became blinded to truth. It occurred also because we became soft and believed that the Law as a mirror was abrogated because in Christ the Law was fulfilled.

Although Christ did fulfil the Law for us, we must remember that the Law was not abrogated.

- We still determine with the Law as yardstick what is righteous and what is not. That is why God unto this day punishes those who fail to keep His Commandments.

Because, after the fall into sin, there were no people who could keep the Law, God sent His Son.

- As a man He was obliged to live subject to the Law.
- God's righteousness determined it so that salvation might become possible for us.
- God's righteousness determined that the death on the cross and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus would prevent Satan from destroying God's work.
- The Lord Jesus died for all these reasons.

We now immediately and clearly see that Christ's ministry had a twofold dimension.

- Undoubtedly there was grace for those whose sins were punished in His body – they are now innocent before God because their sins were punished in Christ.
- They are reconciled with the Lord.
- But through this the others are judged.

Absent sin the Lord Jesus would not have needed to bear the harshest wrath of God and the derision of men.

- The righteousness of God now divides the people of the world.
- The elect are saved and the disobedient are judged.

Seek the righteousness of the Lord. It is the only justness that can give you salvation; for in it you will find the justice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us read what our confession teaches us about this in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's day 4:

4. Lord's Day

Q. 9.

Does not God then do injustice to man, by requiring from him in his law, that which he cannot perform?

A.

Not at all; (a) for God made man capable of performing it; but man, by the instigation of the devil, (b) and his own wilful disobedience, (c) deprived himself and all his posterity of those divine gifts.

(a)

Eph.4:24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Eccl.7:29 Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

(b)

John 8:44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

2 Cor.11:3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

Gen.3:4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

(c)

Gen.3:6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

Rom.5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

Gen.3:13 And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.

1 Tim.2:13 For Adam was first formed, then Eve.

1 Tim.2:14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.

Q. 10.

Will God suffer such disobedience and rebellion to go unpunished?

A.

By no means; but is terribly displeased (a) with our original as well as actual sins; and will punish them in his just judgment temporally and eternally, (b) as he has declared, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of the law, to do them." (c)

(a)

Gen.2:17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Rom.5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

(b)

Ps.5:5 The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.

Ps.50:21 These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.

Nah.1:2 God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies.

Exod.20:5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

Exod.34:7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

Rom.1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

Eph.5:6 Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.

Heb.9:27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:

(c)

Deut.27:26 Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Gal.3:10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

Q. 11.

Is not God then also merciful?

A.

God is indeed merciful, (a) but also just; (b) therefore his justice requires, that sin which is committed against the most high majesty of God, be also punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment

of body and soul.

(a)

Exod.34:6 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,

Exod.34:7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

Exod.20:6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

(b)

Ps.7:9 Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just: for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins.

Exod.20:5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

Exod.23:7 Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked.

Exod.34:7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

Ps.5:5 The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.

Ps.5:6 Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the LORD will abhor the bloody and deceitful man.

Nah.1:2 God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies.

Nah.1:3 The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Hymn: 5-2:4.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen

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